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CHIME THROUGH THE YEARS

“AMAZÓNICAS: GUARDIANS OF LIFE” BY CHARLES GAY

CHIME FOR CHANGE Through the Years: The Female Fabric is a series curated by CHIME Managing Editor Mariane Pearl featuring stories from the CHIME journalism platform archives by women around the world.



I learned about the March for Life through my friend photographer Felipe Jacome. He told me how in October 2013, 70 women from 7 different indigenous tribes of the Ecuadorian Amazon embarked on a 250-km march to the country’s capital. They **walked, babies in arms and children at their sides to ask** the central government to spare their habitat from a worldwide auction sale that would sell parts of their ancestral lands to oil companies.

The march was totally disregarded by the global and national media, the public only found out about their initiative when they reached Quito, a couple of weeks later.

I first met some of the protesters in New York City. During a press conference by Amazon Watch, they denounced the catastrophic human and ecological consequences of losing their land. Ecuador had turned to the Chinese Development Bank to reshape its infrastructures and when oil price fell, it became dependent on China and was forced to trade its natural resources. **The Amazon rainforest became the ground of social and ecological disasters among which, the pollution of river streams and the extinction of isolated tribes.**

The fact that women are at the heart of this struggle has a powerful resonance. Amazonian women, like most of indigenous women around the globe, are devoted and extremely hard working people. They raise their families, they oversee maintaining their land and preserving their culture, they cook, fish and teach. Their relation to the forest is intimate, they call it the "motherland." The forest is female.

The "March for Life" was a tremendous progress for the status of indigenous women. Men leaders are not taken seriously by the government anymore. There are too many charges of corruption after years negotiating with oil companies.

The marchers waited days and nights in the streets of the capital for their demands to be answered. But the government's response was insulting: President Rafael Correa invited them to walk further to another State he was visiting. House representatives called them irresponsible to walk with their children. They were also deemed "lazy" because they were "skipping their daily duties." Some of them were intimidated, raided by police forces and beaten up.

While the rainforest from above looks like an infinity of green trees separated by river streams, the Ecuadorian part of the Amazon is vibrant with life with seven different nationalities represented and their respective traditions – There are two uncontacted tribes, limitless fauna and the richest eco-system, in the world. The Amazon is the lung of our planet. The women are marching so we can keep breathing.

Charles Gay is an award-winning filmmaker and cinematographer based in Brooklyn, NY. In Paris he worked as an assistant director, camera operator and editor on documentary films on sport and music thematics and later, architecture.



The Ecuadorian oil is a fundamental resource.



And I have to be quiet.