

Mayan Leader Says UN Values 'Pretty Speeches' over Indigenous Ways



Washington, May 19 (RHC-teleSUR) -- The United Nations is disappearing traditional belief systems and enforcing its own superiority by privileging stiff bureaucracy over indigenous ways, Mayan leader Policarpio Chaj said in an interview with teleSUR on Wednesday

“We had one system of rights, and they are imposing another system of rights—meaning that the previous one has disappeared,” he said.

The U.N. Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, now in its second week, invites state and indigenous representatives from around the world, but both are granted equal opportunities to speak. If the international body really wanted to respect indigenous values and the indigenous fight for survival, said Chaj—head Guatemalan refugee organization Maya Vision—then they would not let state representatives have the “privilege to read pretty speeches,” which he cast as lies that obscure grave human rights abuses.

“We feel obligated to say what they (the U.N.) want us to hear,” said Chaj. But he maintained that his organization’s two representatives at the forum will buck that pressure and instead express the full list of

abuses they have faced at the hands of the state, including confiscated land, criminalization of families and forced political exile.

The state-centric format also adheres to artificial borders that prevent traditional routes of communication and transportation — the same borders that are separating families daily, he added.

“What we want is for the U.N. to stop being deaf, blind and dumb to the reality of indigenous peoples,” said Chaj. The “hegemonic” institution drafts recommendations every year, but rarely do states heed their instructions.

Since the paper products of the forum are of virtually no use, Maya Vision goes to network with other indigenous leaders around the world, since “our fight has no borders.”

Chaj, who is a refugee in the United States after escaping state violence for his activism, said that he is still very connected to his family back home, with “one foot in the United States and one foot in Guatemala.” The local fight is the one he’s interested in, which may draw inspiration from U.N. declarations, but in the end rely on the strength of the people.

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