**“For us the land is sacred”**

Adapted from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/nov/04/bonn-climate-conference-on-the-road-with-defenders-of-the-forest>

Of the many thousands of participants at the [Bonn climate conference](http://unfccc.int/meetings/bonn_nov_2017/meeting/10084.php) which begins on 6 November, there will arguably be none who come with as much hope, courage and anger as the busload of indigenous leaders who have been criss-crossing Europe over the past two weeks, on their way to the former German capital.

The 20 activists on the tour represent forest communities that have been marginalised over centuries but are now increasingly recognised as important actors against climate change through their protection of carbon sinks. Their aim is to build support for their role as forest defenders – a role that frequently puts them odds with agribusiness, mining companies and public security. The *Observer* caught up with them on the road to Paris.

“We have been looking after the forest for thousands of years. We know how to protect them,” said Candida Dereck Jackson, vice president of the National Indigenous Alliance in Honduras, as she outlined the principal demands of the group: respect for land rights, recognition of crimes against the environment, direct negotiations over forest protection, decriminalisation of indigenous activists, and free, prior and informed consent before any development by outsiders.

In one sense it is part of a battle that first peoples – as many indigenous groups refer to themselves – have been fighting since their territories were colonised hundreds of years ago. But this time the campaign is being waged from a bus – previously used for rock music tours and election campaigns – in the context of growing concern about the climate and environment.

This has provided some overlap with their ancient struggle to retain ancestral land and a different set of values.

Cándido Mezúa of the Mesoamerican Alliance of Peoples and Forests: “We see with great sadness that billions of dollars are invested in agribusiness and the institutions that are behind the crisis we are facing, but there is very little interest in indigenous populations who can help with a solution,” he said at a stop at the Royal Society in London. Instead of such huge sums, participants in the indigenous caravan say they could contribute more to the fight against climate change if their land rights were recognised and states accepted the concept of crimes against the environment. “Money is not important for indigenous people. What we want, frankly, is for you to leave us alone,” said Mina Setra of the Indigenous Peoples’ Alliance of the Archipelago. “We don’t want to be criminalised for protecting our land.”

Indigenous activists want a place at the climate negotiating table. At Copenhagen and other previous conferences, they were often treated as an exotic and sometimes disruptive diversion who turned up for photos in traditional dress but were given scant opportunity to participate. This is changing, albeit slowly.

As the bus speeds along the motorway, Mark Rivas – a Miskito from Nicaragua – gazes out of the window at the grey skies and peaceful farmlands of northern Europe and reflects on the very different situation in his community. Seven Miskito have been killed so far this year for opposing a [land grab by ranchers](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/17/world/americas/nicaragua-dispute-over-indigenous-land-erupts-in-wave-of-killings.html), he says, but none of the killers have been brought to justice. He too – like many others on the bus – has been threatened. “On this trip, I want to make these problems more visible and get outside pressure on the Nicaraguan government to ensure our land titles are fully recognised,” he says. “This is a climate issue. We don’t want to give up the land so the forest can be cleared by ranchers. For us it’s sacred.”

1. The indigenous leaders …
2. toured around Europe before arriving in Bonn. b. came to the conference in great numbers. c. are not very excited about the conference.
3. The main objective of the indigenous leaders at the conference is …
   1. to get recognition in their fight against climate change
   2. to get support against agribusiness companies.
   3. to get support in their role in protecting the forests
4. One of the demands outlined by Cándida Derek Jackson involves…
   1. That her organization consents with any development from foreigners
   2. That her organization benefits from developments from outsiders
   3. That members of her organization are decriminalised
5. From the text, it’s understood that a ‘Miskito’ is:
6. an indigenous tribe b. an animal species c. a paramilitary group