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Sarayaku
Before the
Inter-American
Human Rights
System

Justice for the
People of the
Zenith and Their
Living Forest

Mario Melo
Contents

Introduction ........................................................................................................... 7

The Conflict ........................................................................................................ 9
  The Facts ......................................................................................................... 10
  Oil, Threats, and Violence ........................................................................... 15

The Territorial Defense Strategy ..................................................................... 18
  The Political-Organizational Strategy ....................................................... 18
  The Legal Strategy ....................................................................................... 22

Getting the State to Enforce the Measures ....................................................... 27

The Sarayaku Case in International Justice ..................................................... 31
  The Final Stage Before the Inter-American Commission ......................... 31
  The Sarayaku Case Before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights .... 32

The Hearing in Sarayaku Territory .................................................................. 38
  Closing a Cycle ............................................................................................ 39
  The Ecuadorian State Admits Responsibility ............................................. 41

The Judgement .................................................................................................. 44
  The Process of Enforcing the Ruling ............................................................ 45

Summative Reflections: Sarayaku and the Integrity of Human Rights ............ 52
  Social Rights in the Midst of Conflict ......................................................... 54

Bibliography ...................................................................................................... 58
Introduction
This book brings together information and reflections on the case of the Kichwa People of Sarayaku before the Inter-American Human Rights System regarding the defense of their territory and way of living, which has been affected by the hydrocarbon activities of an Argentinian company acting as the operator of an oil block granted by the Ecuadorian state. This work also systematizes, complements, and analyzes the various stages of this case from 2002 to 2015 in order to share a moving and inspiring story that might guide other Indigenous people threatened by extractive or infrastructure projects, or by any other development affecting their territories and hindering the normal development of their lives, worldviews, and cultures.

The protagonists of this story are the Sarayaku people — their leaders, elders, men, women, boys, girls, and teenagers — who invested a very long and significant period of their lives to a cause with a deep historical meaning for their community. We will, of course, address the legal aspects of the case regarding the scope and content of the human rights violated; however, the organizational and political advocacy aspects were equally — or even more — important than the legal arguments in achieving the favorable judgement of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR).

It is only fair to recognize the contributions of the civil society organizations who, throughout the years, accompanied the Sarayaku people in their battle, especially the Centro de Derechos Económicos y Sociales (CDES), the Centro por la Justicia y el Derecho Internacional (CEJIL for its English name), and the Fundación Pachamama.

The author of these pages has had the honor of being the attorney of Sarayaku from the beginning of the case in 2002, when we resorted to Ecuadorian national justice, until today, as we monitor compliance with