



World Forum of Fisher Peoples' [WFFP]
FORO MUNDIAL DE PUEBLOS PESCADORES
FORUM MONDIAL DES POPULATIONAS DE PEC'HEURS
International Secretariat,
No.10, Malwatta Road, Negombo, Sri Lanka.

Your Excellency Ambassador of Panama to the United States José Miguel Alemán Healy,

Today on October 21th 2025, we are delivering this letter to this consulate to demonstrate our support for the Indigenous fishermen of the Ngäbe Buglé region in Panama whose rights are being violated by the national government of Panama today.

In 2009, the government consulted with Indigenous communities to designate the island of Escudo de Veraguas as a marine protected area. This was established in Resolution 0299, which recognizes that any decision-making regarding the Ngäbe Buglé Comarca and Escudo de Veraguas as a marine protected area must be done in conjunction with the regional authorities. **This resolution establishes an agreement between the government and the region or Indigenous led Comarca on their co-management of the island of Escudo de Veraguas.**

On October 6, 2025, the Panamanian government, without consulting regional authorities, created a resolution that dismisses resolution 0299 and Law 10 of 1997 which establishes in Article 50 that the National Institute of Renewable Natural Resources (now called 'Mi Ambiente') must work in collaboration with the Indigenous authorities to make any decisions that impact the Ngäbe Buglé region. This law establishes that the Regional Congress must be involved in all regulations related to the well-being of its inhabitants and the management of the natural resources of its territories.

On February 21, 2025, the Ministry of the Environment sent a letter to the Ngäbe Buglé people informing them of a possible fishing ban on the island of Escudo de Veraguas. The fishermen held an urgent meeting with the fishing community to discuss this letter, the proposed ban, and the impact on the community, unaware that a wave of state violence would soon follow.

In May 2025, the population rose up in protest against Law 462. The government responded with violence, humiliation, murder and abuse of power against women, youth, the elderly, workers, and Indigenous leaders at the hands of the police.

In June 2025, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Dr. Albert K. Barume, traveled to Panama to witness injuries caused by bullets, tear gas, and other lethal munitions. He witnessed the reprisals used by Panamanian authorities against its Indigenous peoples. "I deeply regret what happened here. It is unjust and constitutes a clear violation of international law that should never have happened," Dr. Barume said as he concluded his visit.

On September 15, 2025, Alfonso Simón Raylan and Santiago Smith, two Indigenous Panamanian fishermen and leaders of the SITRAMAR (Sea Workers' Union) organization, traveled to Geneva to participate in the General Assembly of the United Nations Human Rights Council with the support of

international organizations such as the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP). In Geneva, they held numerous strategic meetings with several Special Rapporteurs and with the ambassadors of the Permanent Missions in Geneva of the countries of Colombia, Mexico, and Panama. All of them, including the ambassador of Panama, Juan Alberto Castillero Correa, affirmed that the right of indigenous fishermen to fish in their ancestral fishing grounds is enshrined in the United Nations International Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP), the International Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and in the Small-Scale Fisheries Guidelines housed within the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN).

Upon returning to their territories from Geneva, the fishermen learned that on September 25, 2025, the government sent government workers to confiscate fishing equipment from the humble fishermen of Ngäbe Buglé. We are talking about small subsistence gear such as flippers, masks, snorkels, ropes, and small traps used to store lobster. Government workers released up to 700 pounds of the harvested lobster, which was intended to be used to feed the families living on the island.

The confiscation of fishing gear and the expectation that the Ngäbe Buglé, who have lived on the coast of the Nö Kribo region for hundreds of years, will change their lives and livelihoods in the six months between February, when the initial letter was sent, and September, are direct violations of the 2009 agreements, Law 10 of 1997, and all international law.

On October 8, 2025, officials from Mi Ambiente along with eleven police officers arrived to "measure" and "prepare" the island of Escudo de Veraguas to designate it as a marine park that same week without consulting the Comarca. This designation not only prohibits fishermen from their ancestral fishing activities but also imposes heavy fines if anyone dares to fish to avoid starvation. This violates the food rights of fishermen who have lived in these ancestral territories for centuries and who have always made a living from fishing. If the government declares the island a marine park, fishermen will not be able to enter their island, and this would be conspiring against their source of food and the only economy and economic structure that the coastal sector has in the region.

The Ngäbe Buglé region demands respect for international, national, and regional laws. Today, there is fear among the population that any protest will result in famine, violence, and murders at the hands of the police, as has happened in the past. If private interests are incentivizing this accelerated imposition by the government, it would be illegal according to Article 58 of Law 10.

We ask that this embassy demand that the Panamanian government follow the law, immediately revoke the designation of Escudo de Veraguas Island as a marine park, and continue to co-manage the island as a protected area with the region's Indigenous leadership. This is how we do it in the United States, it must be upheld everywhere in the world.

Sincerely,
Jason Jarvis



Board President
North American Marine Alliance

