

Guatemalan indigenous woman tells a story of discrimination regarding the right to education

In the workshop “Justiciability of the Right to Education in Central America”, Angélica Macario Quino presented proof that the State is not fulfilling its obligation.

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“My personal story is a typical example of most indigenous peoples in Guatemala. My mother tongue is *quiché*; when I first arrived at school I had to learn Spanish, due to the lack of bilingual education. Since there were no bilingual teachers I had to repeat first grade”, recounted Angélica Macario Quino in the workshop “Justiciability of the Right to Education”, promoted by CLADE.

The workshop took place on the 2nd and 3rd of October in Guatemala City prior to CLADE V Assembly and to the Americas Social Forum. In that activity the debate focused on the main violations of the right to education in Central America, Dominican Republic and Haiti, as well on strategies and mechanisms based on the political and legal exigibility of the human right to education.

Addressing representatives of coalitions of Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Perú and Dominican Republic, Angelica described the situation of indigenous people’s education in Guatemala, based on her own personal experience and on the stories she collected in several Mayan communities. She acted as witness to the evidence gathered by the [Center for Human Rights Robert F. Kennedy Memorial](#) in the Report “Right to Education of Afro-descendants and Indigenous Communities in the Americas”, submitted to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights on March 12, 2008.

In that same workshop, Marselha Gonçalves Margerin, lawyer and researcher of the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial, presented the main findings of the report. With regard to the situation in Guatemala, she reminded us that according to the Ministry for Education, “60 percent of urban students will complete school third grade, while only 30 percent of rural students will complete it”. The average schooling for a rural student is only 2.1 years, according to the Ministry for Education.

The report recalled that the country has assumed domestic, regional and international obligations that require the immediate and progressive realization of the right to education on an equal basis without discrimination. However, she highlights that Guatemala has not yet been able to effectively implement this right, underlining that the situation worsens in relation to indigenous people who “comprise over 40 percent of the population but lag behind the rest of the country in educational attainments, literacy rates and earning potential”

Free education: a right to fulfill

Angelica's family is comprised by 12 brothers and sisters. Four of them currently attend the indigenous community primary school of Chichicastenango, in the Quiché province. "The school is about 5 km from my community. There is a school in my community but there are not enough teachers; the different grades also share the rooms, from first to sixth grade. That is why we went to a municipal school, so that the little ones have a better education".

In order to accomplish that, the family has to incur many additional expenses: transportation, uniforms, school supplies and "contributions" for the maintenance and improvement of the education center. In total, Angelica's family spends about 1,200 dollars per year to keep four children in a public school.

"We are aware the State is not fulfilling its obligation. And the reason why we make all that effort is because education is fundamental to us", declared Angelica.

See here the Angélica's testimony in CLADE Workshop "Justiciability of the Right to Education" in Guatemala City.