



LINAJE

Self-determination of a people. The Aché of Paraguay

The telephone call came from Paris. We didn't know we were talking to an Aché refugee, who was about to present a project for Paraguay.

We were able to listen to stories that were told in the first person. We'd never have thought we could have access to such an important patrimony, that we would find out about the individual exodus of some of the Aché, who fled to France to escape a destiny marked by a massacre that took place in the 1950's and 60's, when the Aché were forced to defend their land and their forests from the colonists.

They were persecuted, starved, killed and the women and children were captured and sold as slaves.

They were massacred because they lived in a land that could be conquered, in the violent perpetuation of a hegemony that does not recognize brothers of a same people, that does not admit different knowledge and cultures.

They fled abroad to escape the massacre of an ethnic group.

The love for their country of origin, which is no longer their country.

The intelligence and the determination to rebuild, remember and pass on their origins.

The **Project is Bitawa** and it comes from the Aché.

THE JOURNEY WITH THE FAI:

Our journey, at a long distance, started in 2004, when we received a **LINAJE** project, the Liga Nativa por la Autonomía, Justicia y Ética, which was founded in **2000** by some members of the ethnic group, the Aché, of eastern Paraguay. This organization was set up to defend what remains of a people, whose numbers today are reduced to just over **350** families, about 1,500 people and who had their land, habits, and fundamental rights taken from them.

It was difficult for the **FAI** to decide. We did not know the people we were talking to and our communications were altered by the distance between us. However, we decided to start talking about the project together, without interfering, just trusting such an important cry for help.

We were struck by the uniqueness of Linaje: it consisted of elderly Aché people who live in the woods with other Aché people, who had graduated from Universities abroad and returned to where they were born, to be of service to their people.

We didn't think this would happen and yet, without ever meeting them personally, we managed to support their **dreams of self-determination, of reaffirming their traditions in a modern context.**

BITAWA... in order not to disappear, is a project that has evolved over 10 years in various phases, each of which introduces the next one and has been completed successfully.

Bitawa was founded in **2004**, initially to start a poultry farm to provide protein in the diet of the Aché community. The aim was then broadened to include productive and handicraft activities, courses in healthcare and culture, printing school text books in two languages and providing courses in communication and journalism.

The project, in six phases, has involved refining instruments used to reorganize this ethnic group, which with force but at the same time peacefully, wants to save its history. The Aché want to train a new generation in the woods and in town, so that they can express political messages effectively. Their traditions are being kept alive and are flourishing, and through this their original and heritage is being vigorously revived.

In **2014** the Aché took the Paraguayan government to court to sue for genocide.