



Sibelis Villazón,
a Kankuama
leader.

SEEDS OF LEADERSHIP, ROOTS OF PEACE

Sibelis Villazón's journey reflects the progress made by Indigenous women in peacebuilding, from community leadership to regional advocacy in Sierra Nevada de Gonawindúa.

Amidst the mountains of the Sierra Nevada de Gonawindúa, where rivers flow through the ancestral territory like veins, cobbled paths connect communities as one, and the bahareque houses and kankuruas (two types of traditional houses) preserve the memory of generations, the Kankuama people continue to weave their relationship with Mother Earth. It is a sacred territory, for every space holds a spiritual connection, where women strengthen their role as guardians of life, transmitters of culture and upholders of territorial harmony.

For centuries, the leadership of Kankuama women has been deeply rooted in daily life. Their childhoods are spent around the hearth and at the loom, caring for their families' well-being within the community, whilst becoming heirs to ancestral knowledge as they become involved in the organisation of their indigenous people—where being a woman entails a profound connection to the territory and the Mother of Origin. However, these tasks often remain invisible, even though they form the very foundation of the origin and sustenance of life through the system of knowledge and practices

that represent a fundamental basis of Indigenous leadership. For it is from this that the balance of all that exists, both materially and immaterially, is preserved and maintained.

Today, this leadership, which is intrinsically linked to life, is becoming visible and is expressing itself more actively within the structures of their own governments and in arenas of political and social advocacy, serving as a symbol that broadens conceptions of what peace is, beyond the silence of the guns.



TEXT AND PHOTO:
**CABILDO INDÍGENA
DEL RESGUARDO
KANKUAMO**



Kankuama women have woven their way into community processes, taking on roles in representation, coordination and decision-making, and contributing their own vision of the territory, peace and Buen Vivir (Good Living).

One of the voices representing this process is that of Sibelis María Villazón Cáceres, a woman from the community of Guatapurí and coordinator of Women and Family affairs for the Kankuama indigenous organisation. Her journey reflects the path of many women who have strengthened their capacities through participation, training and the recognition of their own knowledge. For her, leadership means continuing an ancestral legacy: recognising the roots left by her elders and putting her voice at the service of the community.

From this perspective, peace for Kankuama women is understood not merely as the absence of conflict, but as the ongoing quest for balance between people, the land and the elements that sustain life. Peace is linked to the protection of Mother Earth, autonomy, unity and the continuity of the principles inherited by Indigenous peoples.

As a part of this journey, 2020 saw the emergence of the Mochilón de cabuya de fique (a big bag woven from succulent plant fiber thread), an intercultural peace agenda developed by the Indigenous women of the Sierra Nevada. This process aims to raise awareness of the role of women in Indigenous territories as key actors in peace-building, drawing on their own perspectives, knowledge and forms of organisation.

El Mochilón, as a tapestry of thought and shared endeavour, serves as a space where women from the Kankuama, Wiwa, Arhuaco and Kogui communities exchange leadership experiences and share their lived experiences, strengthen

their voices and develop collective proposals in response to the realities of their territories. As such, these women have been gaining recognition within the Territorial Council of Cabildos – the highest governing body of the Sierra Nevada – and are exerting an ever-greater influence on social dynamics, community processes and, in particular, the defence of their territory, which is now demarcated by the ‘Black Line’ or System of Sacred Sites.

The Kankuama women have forged leadership through their everyday lives, strengthening participation and territorial peace.

Sibelis is one of the Sierra Nevada commissioners participating in forums such as the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP), the Commission for the Clarification of Truth (CEV), institutional forums and inter-jurisdictional dialogues, where they not only highlight the impact of the armed conflict on their people

and on indigenous women, but have also put forward a vision of peace based on memory, justice, autonomy and the defence of their territory.

Through her community leadership, Sibelis acts as a pillar that sustains life in harmony and broadens the understanding of governance through caring, teaching, organising and protecting. She contributes to decision-making forums alongside the men of her community, helping to safeguard Mother Origin and ensure cultural survival.

Sibelis’s story, like that of many women in the Sierra Nevada, is one of collective transformation,

resistance and re-existence. Her presence, though often silent, has gained visible and active participation in the decisions that shape the territory’s future. In the Sierra Nevada de Gonawindúa, their voices continue to weave paths of peace through ancestral memory, the spoken word and a commitment to future generations. [FM](#)

