Foundation and Association for Indigenous Communities in Paraguay
www.indigene-paraguay.ch
info@indigene-paraguay.ch

Autumn Newsletter **October 2026**

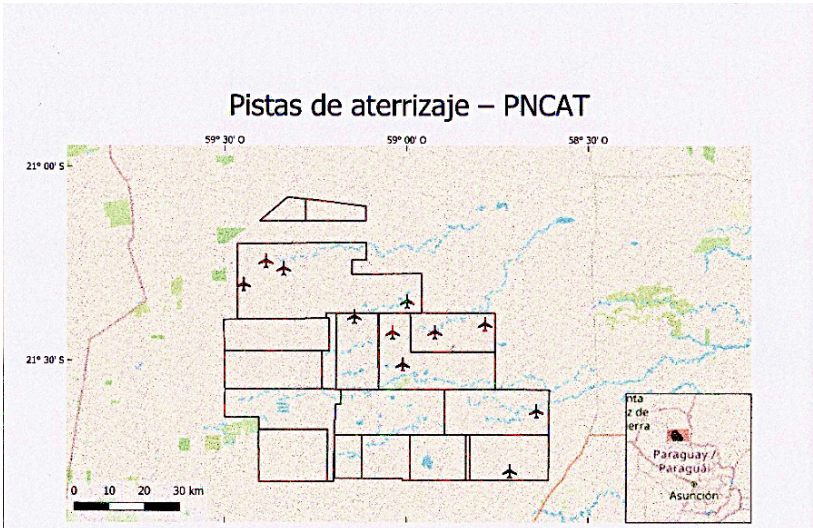
Dear members, patrons and supporters

With this autumn newsletter, we would like to update you on the progress of our activities in 2026 and ask for your valuable support.

2026 Annual General Meeting
On 2 May 2026, our 27th Annual General Meeting took place at the Farnsburg Restaurant in Liestal. Around 25 people attended. Together, we looked back on the association's year in 2025 and discussed current issues. Afterwards, we enjoyed a chance to catch up over an antipasti brunch.

What has happened so far in 2026?

Land rights
Many years ago, the Totobiegosode filed a complaint against the State of Paraguay with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organisation of American States in Washington. They want to hold the state accountable for better protecting their land. This land is their livelihood and is repeatedly threatened by farmers and international companies seeking to clear the forest to make way for cattle farming and soya plantations. Furthermore, our fellow campaigner, Alfred Sawatsky, has identified 11 landing strips for small aircrafts within the protected area using the satellite imagery we have supported. He has sent Julio Duarte satellite images of the area showing deforestation from 2015 to 2025.



Runway locations within the protected area

To our dismay, we learnt at the start of this year that the new lawyer had resigned from his task and had failed to respond to enquiries from the Inter-American Commission. In a last-minute move, the former lawyer, Dr Julio Duarte, agreed to draft a report for the court on behalf of the Totobiegosode. He also represented the community during the hearing of the case before the Commission this summer.
In its decision, the Commission instructed the Paraguayan government to demonstrate that it has taken sufficient measures to protect the area. The Commission asked the Totobiegosode who would actually be representing them, following the resignation of their previous lawyer . This was a delicate question because – as we reported in 2023 – Julio Duarte hadbeen dismissed by the community. However, we have remained in close contact with him.
We are very pleased that all five current leaders of the community recently signed a statement reaffirming Julio Duarte as their representative. He had held this role for more than 10 years prior to his dismissal and knows the community, the area and the relevant figures in the government and the Inter-American Commission better than anyone else.

Only by preserving the forest can the Totobiegosode's livelihoods be secured in the long term. Protecting their land rights strengthens their role as guardians of the land and encourages their active participation in nature conservation.

Land monitoring



Inspection tour in the territory

The so-called 'patrols' remain a key tool for land monitoring. The community patrols parts of the entire area to check for any incidents and encroachments and to maintain a visible presence , which may deter potential intruders.
Unfortunately, only one such patrol has taken place so far in 2026. Due to vehicle breakdowns and other circumstances, there have been frequent postponements.
We have found a partner organisation in EAMI, which organises the patrols with the community. However, this needs to become even more efficient, something we are working on together with EAMI. Next year, we intend to step up the patrols again, as the discovery of landing strips suggests illegal activities, which is very worrying. We can only achieve this with the greater involvement of Dr Julio Duarte, which will incur additional costs. However, we consider it essential to maintain as strong a presence as possible.

Education project

Our ‘Education for Young Indigenous People’ project is supervised by Dr. Julio Duarte and supports young people who wish to attend school. The school is several hours’ journey from the village. We provide financial support for their meals, accommodation and school materials. It is often difficult for the young people to attend because they are usually needed to work as day labourers for a farmer to earn money for their families. This year, three young people have started their studies. Nevertheless, interest within the community in taking advantage of this educational opportunity is growing. A basic education naturally improves their prospects for the future.





Meeting with pupils

The pictures above show Professor Gregorio Prieto, who is helping Julio Duarte to support the indigenous students from the community, in conversation with students and teachers. This support usually takes place in the evening.



Julio Duarte with a student

Health project



Training with a blood pressure monitor

As for healthcare, Dr. Fernando Elias is making great progress. He has begun training people in the communities to act as basic medical support staff who can liaise with him on diagnoses and first aid. Fernando is based in Asunción and can only occasionally travel to the communities (an 8-hour journey). He carries out all these activities on a voluntary basis.

He has trained a young Totobiegosode man who now translates training materials and instructions into Ayoreo, so that they can be better understood and also reproduced by others

One of the most significant achievements in the second half of last year was the establishment of a more efficient workflow with the surgical teams in Asunción, enabling indigenous patients to receive rapid support when needed. Dr. Carlos Sosa, a surgeon at the Hospital de Clínicas of the UNA (Universidad Nacional de Asunción), played a crucial role in ensuring that our patients received urgently needed treatment appointments within an overburdened healthcare system. He also ensured that government officials prioritised the documentation of 'indigenous status', which is crucial for prompt care and the granting of fee exemptions.

Following persistent lobbying and follow-up with the "Dirección de Salud Indígena" (Directorate for Indigenous Health) at the Ministry of Health, we have seen a significant improvement: the state family health service has been carrying out more regular visits to Chaidi and, more recently, even to Arocojnadi. This is a significant step towards shared responsibility and sustainability. It also reinforces one of our key messages to the communities: public services can and should be involved, even if the system is still far from perfect.



Practical exercise in blood

Dental Students Sub-project



A group of dental students from the University of Basel visited Paraguay last year (with our support). They spent a few weeks there providing free dental care, including to indigenous people. It was such a success story that another group of final-year female students will be travelling to Paraguay again this coming January. We are supporting these young women once again and this time aim to establish a collaboration with Dr. Fernando Elias.



Conclusion: You and us = the perfect team!

As you can see, this project is getting better and better. We are trying to make a difference for a small group of indigenous people with very limited resources. Without our support, they would have far fewer opportunities to lead a dignified life on their own land.

We would like to express our heartfelt thanks to everyone for their support with time and/or money so far! Over the past year, many people have contributed far more than the membership fee, which is essential for us. Looking ahead to next year and the additional expenditure required to safeguard the land we would once again ask you to make a specific donation, if your circumstances allow. You can use the enclosed payment slip, quoting ‘Land Safeguarding 2027’.

We are a small group of volunteers working exclusively on a voluntary basis to make a difference for people living far from Switzerland, whilst also contributing to the conservation of nature. Together, however, we have been successfully improving the lives of these people for many years. Thank you for your attention and support! With this, we aim to continue helping those who are less privileged.

On behalf of the entire Executive Committee, with warm regards,
Hans Weenink and Claudio Losa