



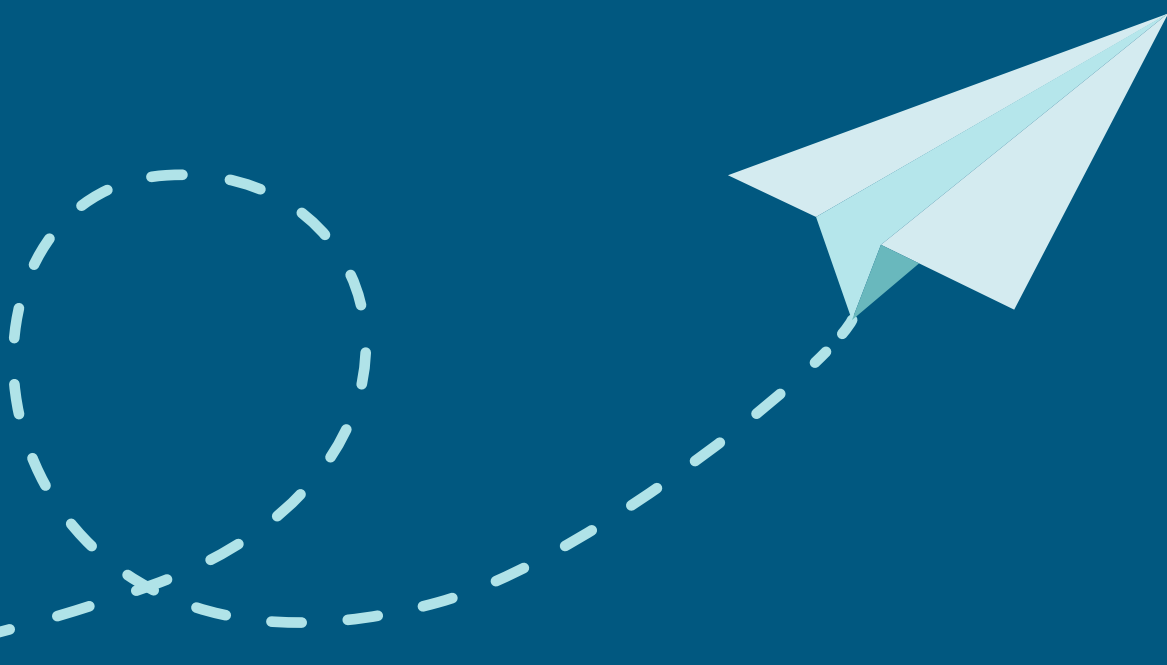
MISSION REPORT TO PANAMA

AUGUST 17 TO 22, 2023



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OVERVIEW

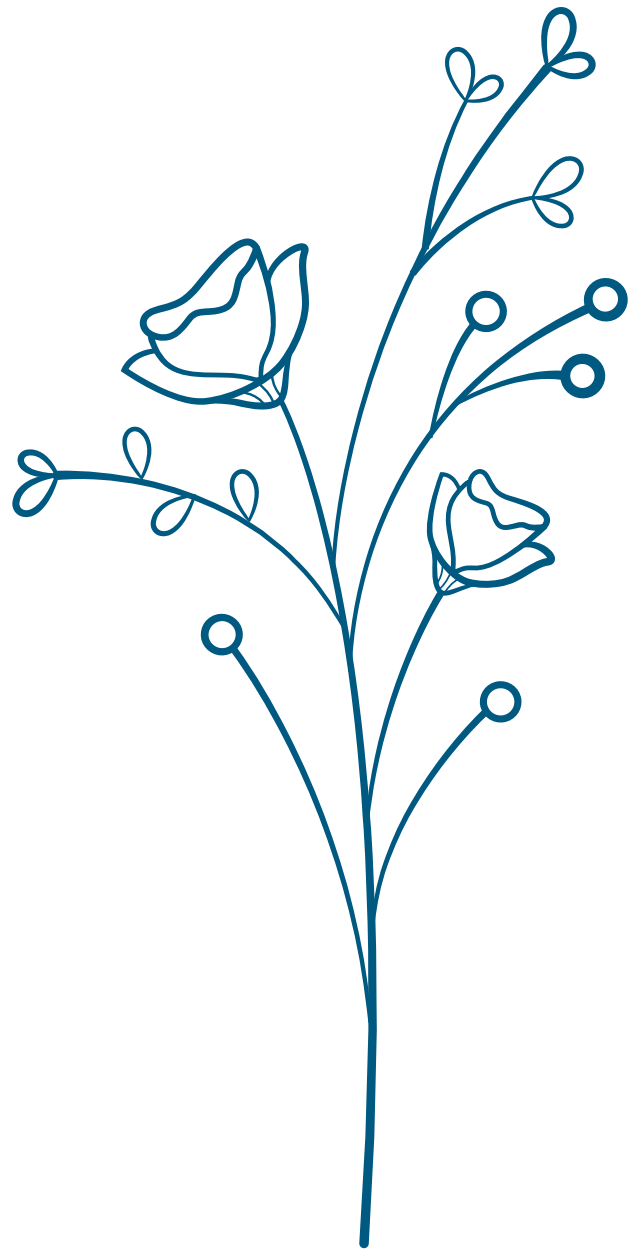
From **August 17 to 22, 2023**, NWAC **visited Panama** on a relationship-building mission to develop new connections with both government representatives and entrepreneurs to foster economic growth for Indigenous Peoples across both countries.

Participants:

- Ms. Lynne Groulx, CEO–The Native Women’s Association of Canada.
- Ms. Tania Molina, Senior Director of International Relations–The Native Women’s Association of Canada.

Objectives:

- Establish joint work mechanisms by engaging with Indigenous Peoples in the area to strengthen the exchange of knowledge and experiences between Panama and Canada. This will involve holding government meetings, particularly with organizations dedicated to Women and Gender Equality.
- Create trade prospects and stimulate economic growth by facilitating commercial opportunities for entrepreneurs, and female small business owners involved in handicrafts and handmade products.



BACKGROUND

This six-day visit to Panama was part of a series of international missions across the Americas to continue the essential relationship building between NWAC and the eight nations that make up The Central American Integration System (Spanish: Sistema de la Integración Centroamericana, or SICA); Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, and the Dominican Republic. NWAC CEO, Lynne Groulx, had already traveled to El Salvador, and Costa Rica and will make similar visits to the other five countries in the coming months. SICA's eight member states include more than 60 different Indigenous groups comprising approximately 20 per cent of the total population of Central America.

Seven different groups of Indigenous Peoples live in Panama, including:

- **THE NGÄBE**

The Ngäbe are the largest Indigenous group living in Panama, and a quarter of a million people speak Ngäbere, with the majority living within the Comarca Ngäbe-Buglé. Communities here largely practice subsistence agriculture.

- **THE BUGLÉ**

The Buglé community share the Comarca Ngäbe-Buglé with the Ngäbe, and many of them speak the Buglé language. The Buglé are known for creating beautiful artisanal bags, called chácaras.

- **THE GUNA/KUNA**

The Guna consists of 50,000 people living in 66 communities across five comarcas, in Caribbean Island communities where lobstering, fishing, and tourism dominate the local economy. They are known for their intricately designed molas, a woven cloth panel that adorns the front and back of traditional dresses worn by women in the group.

- **THE EMBERÁ**

The Emberá people live in both Panama and Colombia, with a population of around 83,000 across both countries. They are known as skillful weavers and carvers creating baskets using chungá (black palm) leaves as well as transforming cocobolo wood and tagua (ivory palm) seeds into statues and miniatures.

• THE WOUNAAN

Like the Emberá, the Wounaan People also live between Panama and Colombia but speak a distinct language called maach meu. The Wounaan live in small communities' dependant on the area's forests, streams, and mangroves for their livelihood and culture.

• THE BRIBRI

Only a small settlement of the Bribri people live in Panama with many more residing in neighbouring Costa Rica. Traditionally they have lived from fishing, cultivation of bananas, plantains, cocoa, and the production of handicrafts but more recently have also become ambassadors of ethno-tourism.

• THE NASO TJERDI

The Naso Tjërdi community numbers around 3,500 people living mostly in northwest Panama. The Naso Tjërdi is the last remaining Indigenous group in the Americas to have a monarchy.

These groups represent 12 per cent of the total Panamanian population. Spread across six regions, or comarcas, over 1.7 million hectares, these communities are semi autonomously governed by the Indigenous people living there.

NWACS GOING GLOBAL MISSIONS

AIM TO STRENGTHEN INTERNATIONAL CONNECTIONS TO BETTER REPRESENT THE NEEDS AND VOICES OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN, GIRLS, TWO-SPIRIT, TRANSGENDER, AND GENDER-DIVERSE PEOPLE WORLDWIDE.

ITINERARY OVERVIEW

THURSDAY 17

- Arrival in Panama City, Panama.

FRIDAY 18

- Meeting with the Minister of Women, H.E Juana Herrera.
- Meeting with the Director of Indigenous Women, Sara Omi.
- Meeting with Deputy Petita Ayarza.
- Meeting with the Canadian Embassy.
- Meeting with the Ambassador and Executive Secretary of the Authority for Investment Attraction and Export Promotion (PROPANAMA), H.E Carmen Gisela Vergara.
- Visits to designers' ateliers along with PROPANAMA.

SATURDAY 19

- Visit to the AMARIE project.
- Meeting with artists Kansuet and Thony Lions.

SUNDAY 20

- Visit to Panama City's historic Casco Viejo district.

MONDAY 21

- Visits to various Indigenous craft shops and galleries to connect and support local craftspeople and invest in artisanal products.

TUESDAY 22

- Return to Canada.

FRIDAY AUGUST 18

Meeting with the Minister of Women, H.E Juana Herrera

NWAC CEO, Lynne Groulx met with H.E Juana Herrera, the Minister of Women. Also in attendance at the meeting were a gathering of Indigenous women who had organized a knowledge-sharing session and a small exhibition, as well as Deputy Petita Ayarza.

The group were able to discuss their shared experiences as female entrepreneurs and leaders, advocate for economic connections and partnerships with Indigenous Women in Panama and emphasized the importance of governmental support in empowering Indigenous women.

Lynne Groulx elaborated on NWAC's work to support Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, transgender, and gender-diverse people (WG2STGD), including the construction of our new state-of-the-art Social, Cultural,

and Economic Innovation Centre. The centre includes Cafe Bouleau, and Artisanelle Boutique which form part of NWAC's social entrepreneurship ventures. The centre hosts community and government leaders, workshops and special events and can be rented as a meeting space providing an additional source of fundraising.

Additional NWAC initiatives include the POETA DigiSpark Project in conjunction with The Trust for the Americas and the Organization of American States (OAS) and The National Apprenticeship Program (NAP) which both provide opportunities for Indigenous WG2STGD people to access education, training and entrepreneurship opportunities. Lynne Groulx reciprocated the hospitality she received by inviting Minister H.E Juana Herrera and Deputy Petita Ayarza to visit NWAC in Canada.



The Ministry of Women

The Ministry of Women is a new government department created in 2023 with the aim to expand public policies to ensure equal opportunities throughout the country. It also promotes, guarantees, and encourages the participation of women in all areas of development and growth in Panama.

H.E Juana Herrera

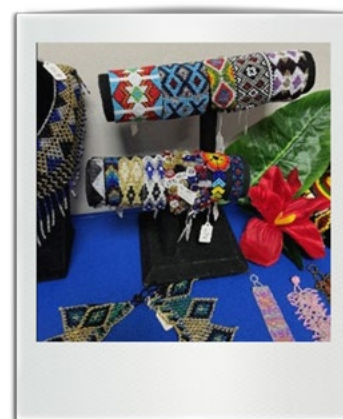
Dr. Juana Herrera Arauz is the first Minister of Women in Panama, appointed on March 14, 2023, through an Executive Decree signed by the President of the Republic, Laurentino Cortizo Cohen. She holds extensive professional training in medicine, including a Doctorate in Clinical Sciences in Psychiatry with a specialization in Addictions; a master's in education with emphasis on Educational Administration; and a Postgraduate degree in Psych Pedagogy.

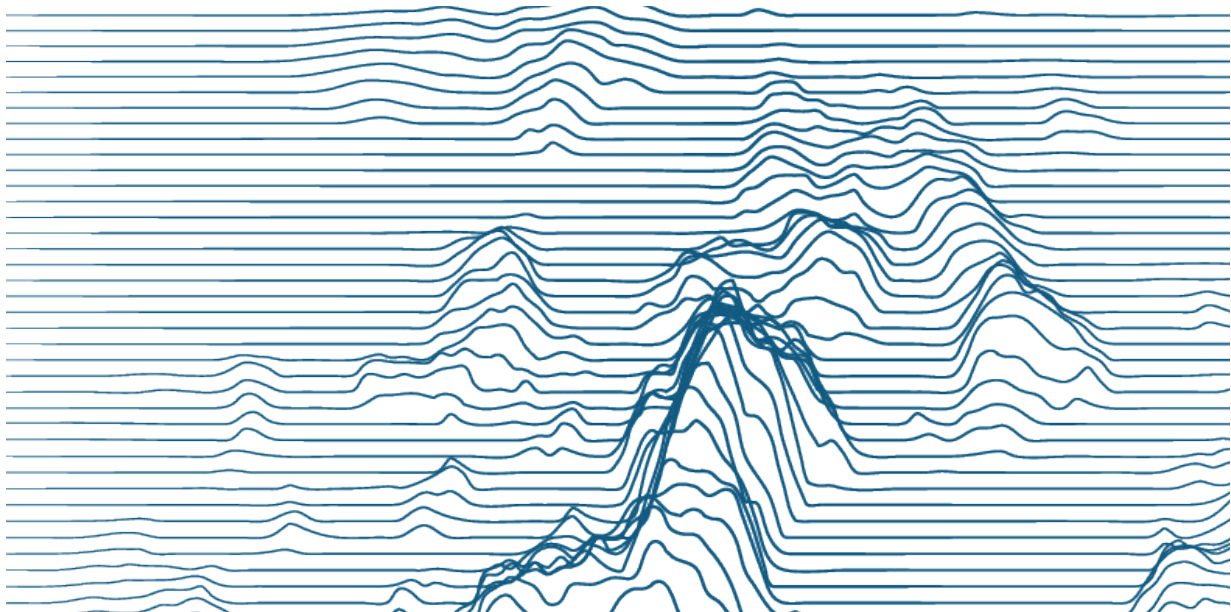
Deputy Petita Ayarza

Deputy Petita Ayarza is an Indigenous businesswoman and politician. She became the first Guna woman to run for a seat as deputy in 2019 and was elected to the National Assembly of Panama.

Deputy Ayarza has been a member of the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) for more than 20 years, and has assumed leadership positions as party delegate, president of the organization, and president of the party's regional collective. She was the first woman to hold these positions within her party in the Guna Yala region.

Deputy Ayarza is a tireless advocate for the rights of Indigenous peoples, and especially for the empowerment of women of the Guna ethnic group.





Meeting with Sara Omi at the Ministry of Government

Lynne Groulx met with Sara Omi, Director of Indigenous Women who is in charge of the Indigenous Women's Empowerment Plan in Panama. They discussed the significance of the Economic Empowerment Strategy targeting Indigenous Women in Panama (PEMIP 2025).

Lynne Groulx also spoke about the issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) in Canada and the three-year inquiry resulting in the Final Report from the National Inquiry. Researchers found that Indigenous women are 12 times more likely to be murdered or go missing than other women in Canada, and three times more likely to be sexually assaulted. The report made 231 Calls for Justice and stated that acts of violence against Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people in Canada is a "genocide."

Sara Omi

Sara Omi is president of the Coordinator of Territorial Women Leaders of Mesoamerica and an Embera leader from the General Embera Congress of Alto Bayano in the Darien forests of Panama. Indigenous Embera and Wounan communities' number about 15,000 people in Panama, and most of the territory is rainforest which the communities have managed for centuries.

Two communities in Alto Bayano recently won their land titles, as a result of a precedent-setting ruling from the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. Sara Omi is an expert in human rights, especially in rights of Indigenous Peoples, Indigenous women, and youth, and she has worked with the Organization of Young Embera and Wounaan of Panama (OJEMP).

Economic Empowerment Plan for Indigenous Women in Panama (PEMIP 2025)

This comprehensive and pioneering initiative brings together commitments from various stakeholders to progress towards full inclusion and socio-economic rights for Panamanian Indigenous women based on their leadership and self-determination.

This is the first public policy for the economic empowerment of Indigenous women in the country and an innovative proposal for the region. PEMIP 2025 is led by The Ministry of Government, in conjunction with its Deputy Ministry of Indigenous Affairs and The Advisory Committee of Indigenous Women in Panama (CAMIP).

The goals of the Economic Empowerment Plan for Indigenous Women in Panama (PEMIP 2025) are to advance the full inclusion and socioeconomic rights of Panamanian Indigenous women, through:

- Greater connectivity, and accessibility to digital resources.
- Better access to all levels of education, scholarships, and job opportunities.
- More public and private contracting opportunities for Indigenous women workers.
- Facilitating and strengthening the leadership opportunities for Indigenous women.
- Contributing to raising levels of financial education, banking use and access to credit by Indigenous women.



Meeting with the Canadian Embassy

Lynne Groulx was invited to lunch with the Canadian Embassy. During this meeting she met with Barry Bristman, Chargé d’Affaires, a.i., Dieter Ploeger, Political Analyst and Gilberto Abrego, from the Indigenous Professional Program. They discussed the support the embassy provides to Indigenous groups and various ongoing work in Panama including the AMARIE research project.

The groups were impressed with NWACs missions to engage with Indigenous communities in the Americas and said they would closely follow future initiatives. Additionally, Lynne Groulx was invited to attend or send a representative to be a panelist at an upcoming event, titled “Recommendations for Best Practices for Indigenous Inclusion.” This event will see Indigenous leaders from six countries in the Americas discussing Indigenous Inclusion.

Canadian embassies in Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama, and Peru present the roundtable event on National Day of Truth and Reconciliation, commemorated in Canada on September 30. This day honours the children who never returned home and the survivors of residential schools, as well as their families and communities. The public commemoration of the tragic and painful history and the ongoing impacts of residential schools is a vital component of the reconciliation process in Canada.

Meeting with H.E Carmen Gisela Vergara, Ambassador and Executive Secretary of the Authority for Investment Attraction and Export Promotion (PROPANAMA)

Lynne Groulx met with Carmen Gisela, General Administrator PROPANAMA and Director of International Cooperation to discuss the promotion of Indigenous hand made products to international markets and the attraction of sustainable investments with social impact which contribute to the improvement of the quality of life of Panamanians. They talked about how PROPANAMA helps connect businesses such as Indigenous women-owned enterprises with global markets.

Carmen Gisela was very interested to learn more about NWAC’s business model in social innovation including our new Social, Cultural, and Economic Innovation Centre. A grassroots home for empowerment featuring numerous multi-use meeting and workshop spaces, which host culturally relevant, gender-based training and education programs. On site businesses like Café Bouleau and our Artisanelle Boutique support designers and entrepreneurs as well as providing employment for local Indigenous women.

PROPANAMA

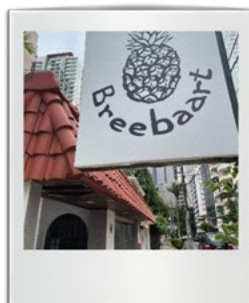
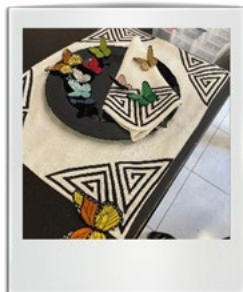
PROPANAMA is the Export and Investment Promotion Authority of Panama.

They develop and implement strategies to attract investment and promote exports that contribute to the economic and social development of the country.

Visits to Designers' Ateliers Along with PROPANAMA

NWAC representatives visited Breebaart, a boutique that combines modern styles with beautiful fabrics and clothing created by the Panamanian Guna people. Each piece, including textiles, and craftwork is handmade and takes several days to create.

They also visited Jochebec Design, an Indigenous brand that seeks to break down stereotypes of the physical beauty of women with designs that epitomise elegance.



SATURDAY AUGUST 19

Visit to the AMARIE Project

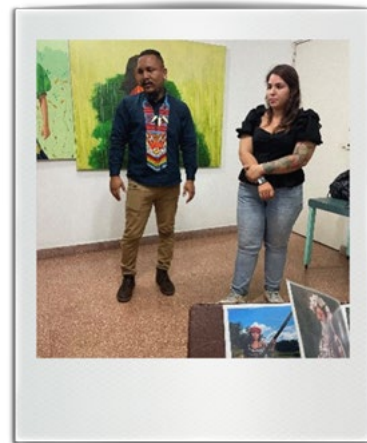
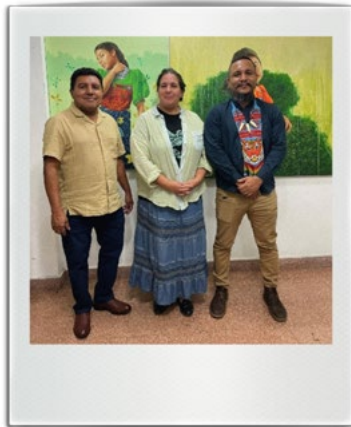
The Bayano-McGill Reforestation Project is McGill's flagship carbon offsetting research project led by the McGill Office of Sustainability, the traditional Indigenous authorities of the Congreso General Emberá de Alto Bayano, and the Indigenous women's NGO, Asociación de Mujeres Artesanas de Ipetí-Emberá (AMARIE) in Panama.

This joint project aims to offset carbon emissions through Indigenous tree stewardship and includes collaboration between

various individuals representing the communities, including the nokos (local chiefs) from Ipetí- and Piriati-Emberá, the cacique general (regional chief), an AMARIE representative, and a researcher from the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute (STRI).

Sara Omi guided the visit where Lynne Groulx was welcomed into the AMARIE project by the community. They were able to discuss shared experiences among Indigenous communities and took part in a cultural exchange. There was also an exhibition of locally made products including textiles, jewellery, and baskets.





Meeting with Artists Kansuet and Thony Lions

Lynne Groulx met with artists Kansuet and Thony Lions and was able to view some of their impressive works.

Kansuet

Kansuet studied at the School of Plastic Arts of the National Institute of Culture of Panama (INAC). His work has been featured in countless exhibitions, biennials, charity auctions, Art Fairs, in the Art Auction of the Museum of Contemporary Art of Panama (MAC) and in 2019, he participated in DULEMAR, the first exhibition dedicated to the culture of the Gunadule people, or Guna, presented at the Museum of Contemporary Art of Panama (MAC).

He was commissioned to create portraits of presidents Martín Torrijos E. (2009) and Demetrio H. Brid (2015) which are displayed in the Yellow Hall

of the Presidency of Panama, Palacio de Las Garzas.

His work explores the connection between humans and the natural and spiritual world, which is so essential in the Guna culture. His muse and symbol of the Guna essence and its traditions is his daughter Alyson, a central figure of his works.

Thony Lions

Thony Lions has spent many years documenting the rich cultures of the original peoples of Panama. He is the first Panamanian ethno-photographer to participate in the Atlas of Humanity, which documents the faces and customs of surviving ancestral cultures around the world.

His process involves visiting communities, making genuine connections, and sharing in their daily life before taking photographs in an unobtrusive way.

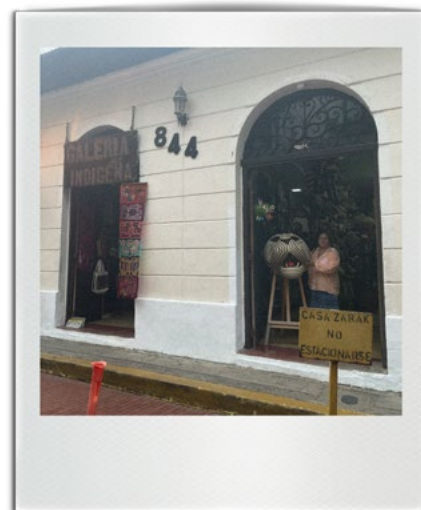
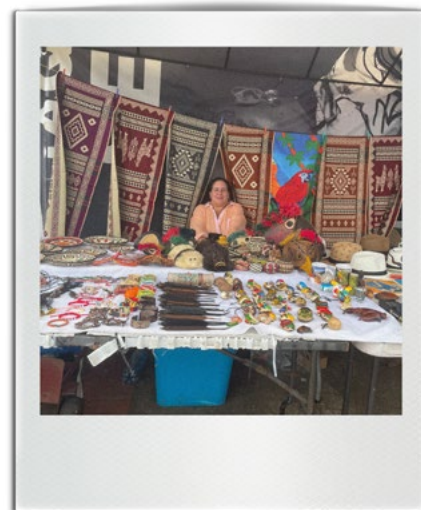
SUNDAY AUGUST 20

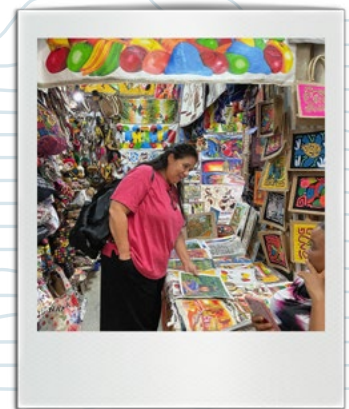
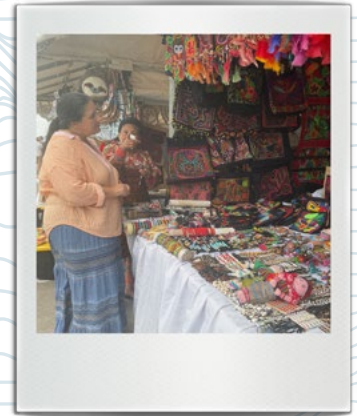
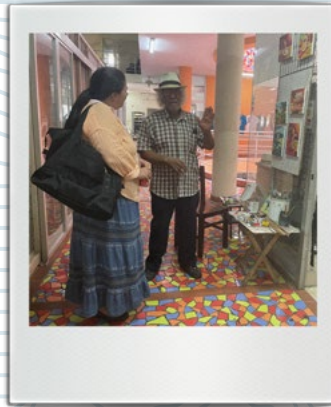
Visit to Casco Viejo

NWAC representatives visited Casco Viejo to learn more about Indigenous made artwork and handicrafts in this region. The Casco Viejo, Spanish for Old Quarter, is a World Heritage Site established in 1673, and is located on a peninsula of the city, near the Panama Canal.

This was following a pirate attack in 1671, when the city was destroyed. The new city included a defensive system of walls to protect from future attacks. There are around 800 buildings featuring different architectural styles that showcase the diversity of cultures in the country.

While in the city, NWAC connected with Indigenous women at Paseo de la Veraneras, an area where local artisans come to share their handicrafts at multiple stalls underneath a flowering tunnel.





MONDAY AUGUST 21

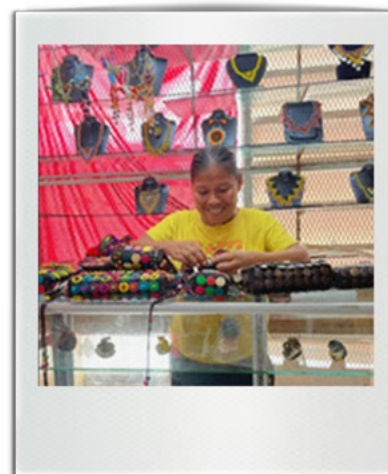
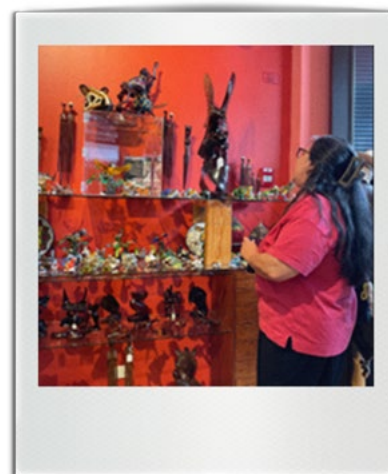
On the last day of the mission to Panama, NWAC was able to support local Indigenous entrepreneurs by acquiring artisanal products as a component of our commitment to social innovation. Connections were made between NWAC representatives, artisans, their families and communities. Some of the artists encountered and supported, included:

Karavan Gallery

The Karavan Gallery showcases fine Indigenous artisanal goods including mola paneled and geometric clothing worn by the Guna people. Among other handmade items on display were baskets, bowls, pillows, plates, and paintings—some with traditional designs and others more contemporary in style.

Galeria de Arte Indigena

A gallery in Casco Viejo with an extensive selection of Indigenous handicrafts from the Panamanian rainforest, such as Guna molas, Embera baskets, animal figures carved from tagua palm seeds, decorated gourds, and hammocks.



CONCLUSION

NWAC CEO, Lynne Groulx, and Tania Molina, Senior International Director of NWAC spent six days in Panama developing joint work mechanisms, engaging with Indigenous Peoples in the area, and sharing an exchange of knowledge and experiences between Panama and Canada.

Lynne Groulx was also able to meet with Indigenous artisans, securing products and making social and economic connections between our two countries.

By making direct contact with artists and craftspeople NWAC developed trade prospects and helped stimulate economic growth by acquiring handicrafts and handmade products.

Lynne Groulx was also able to share NWACs business model in social innovation and invite Panamanian officials, Indigenous leaders, and other stakeholders to visit our Social, Cultural, and Economic Innovation Centre in Gatineau Quebec to continue the knowledge and cultural exchange between our countries that begun on this mission.

This work will continue on future visits to the remaining five SICA countries that NWAC intends to visit as part of these Going Global missions, including Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic.

THIS MISSION TO PANAMA CONTINUES NWACS ESSENTIAL WORK BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS ACROSS THE AMERICAS TO ENGAGE WITH INDIGENOUS LEADERS, COMMUNITIES, AND GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS TO PROMOTE THE ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN, GIRLS, TWO-SPIRIT, TRANSGENDER, AND GENDER-DIVERSE PEOPLE GLOBALLY.

SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS



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