

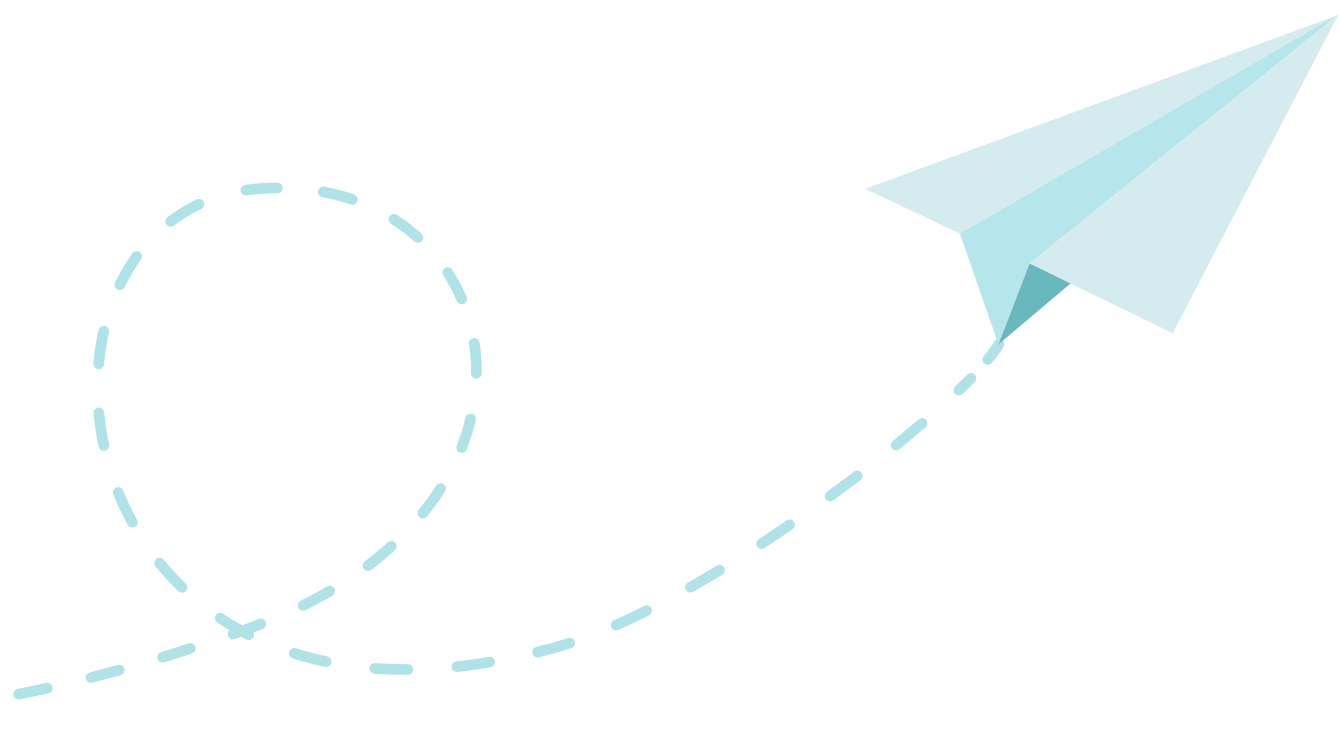


MISSION REPORT TO COSTA RICA

JULY 16 TO 22, 2023

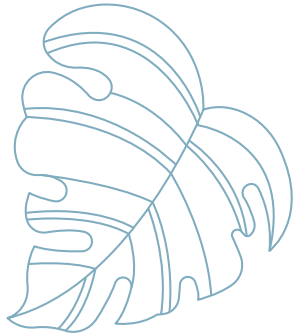


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OVERVIEW



From July 16 to 22, 2023, NWAC visited Costa Rica 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, Director of International Relations – The Native Women's Association of Canada

Objectives:

- Engage with Indigenous Peoples in Costa Rica to strengthen the exchange of knowledge and experiences, and to develop new economic relationships.

Establish joint work mechanisms between Costa Rica and Canada through government meetings, particularly with organizations dedicated to women and gender equality.

- Foster connections with the Costa Rican Legislative Assembly, with a particular focus on building a relationship with Deputy Sonia Rojas, who holds the distinction of being the first Indigenous Deputy in Costa Rica's history.
- Create trade prospects and stimulate economic growth by facilitating commercial opportunities for entrepreneurs, and women small business owners involved in handicrafts and handmade products.



BACKGROUND

This seven-day visit to Costa Rica was one of a series of missions 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 will make similar visits to the other six 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.

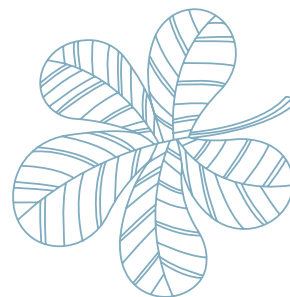
Costa Rica is home to eight different groups of Indigenous Peoples including Huetar, Maleku, Bribri, Cabécar, Brunka, Ngäbe, Bröran and Chorotega, which make up 2.4 per cent of the total population.



This mission included the following key components:

- *Developing trading opportunities and economic development with local entrepreneurs.*
- *Meeting and collaborating with Indigenous people in the region for a knowledge and cultural exchange.*
- *Government meetings with representatives from various departments including the equivalents of Global Affairs, Heritage, Economic Development, and Women and Gender Equality groups in Costa Rica.*

These visits are part of NWAC's Going Global mission and help strengthen our international connections to better represent the needs and voices of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, transgender, and gender-diverse people.



ITINERARY OVERVIEW

SUNDAY 16

- Arrival in San Jose, Costa Rica.

MONDAY 17

- Meeting with Vice Minister for Multilateral Affairs, Christian Guillermet-Fernandez.
- Meeting with Vice Minister of Justice and Peace, Sergio Sevilla Perez.
- Meeting with Deputy Sonia Rojas.
- Tour of the General Assembly of Costa Rica

TUESDAY 18

- Meeting with Romel Gonzalez from the Abya Yala Indigenous Coordination Coalition.
- Meeting with Vital Voices.
- Vital Voices side event.
- Meeting with LGBTQIA+ organizations.
- Meeting with Luis Alonso Reyes and female entrepreneurs.

WEDNESDAY 19

- Trip to Buenos Aires.
- Meeting with Graciela Núñez Marchena, National Coordinator of the Local Development Office of Buenos Aires.
- Attending an Indigenous Fair .
- Interview with MIFUTE.

THURSDAY 20

- Trip to San Antonio.
- Visiting a Ngäbe-Buglé Women's Fair in Altos de San Antonio.
- Transfer to Neily City.
- Visiting a Ngäbe-Buglé Indigenous Women's Fair in Alto Conte.

FRIDAY 21

- Transfer to San Jose
- Viewing Indigenous handicraft and artisan products.

SATURDAY 22

- Return to Canada



MONDAY 17

MEETING AT THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

NWAC CEO, Lynne Groulx attended an important meeting to negotiate a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Native Women's Association of Canada and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Costa Rica.

This agreement between NWAC and governmental institutions of Costa Rica is related to economic promotion, women entrepreneurship, and Indigenous populations.

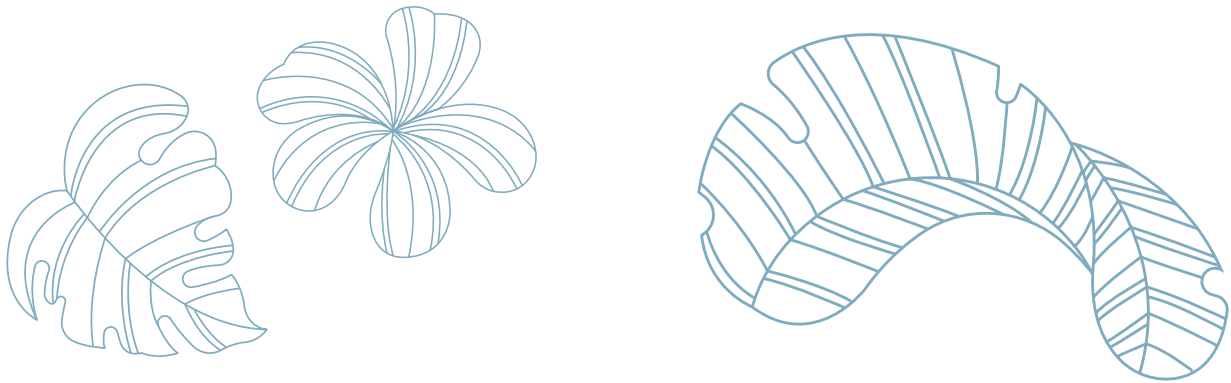
During this meeting Lynne Groulx met Vice Minister Christian Guillemet-Fernandez and discussed the Memorandum of Understanding. She also shared news about NWAC's work with Central American Integration System (SICA) countries and outlined our three main objectives:

- Facilitate exchanges between NWAC and local grassroots Indigenous women's groups and entrepreneurs.
- Establish connections with government officials at the Deputy Minister level, such as those from the equivalent of Global Affairs, Heritage, Economic Development, and Women and Gender Equality groups in Costa Rica.
- Procure artisan goods for resale in Canada as part of a social innovation initiative.

They also discussed the possibility of collaborating on youth-focused projects. Mr. Guillemet-Fernandez expressed a keen interest in NWAC's social innovation initiatives and a desire to replicate them in Costa Rica. He intends to establish coordination with the United Nations program for Indigenous Peoples working in Central America.

Elizabeth Williams, Canadian Ambassador in Costa Rica was also in attendance.





MEETING WITH VICE MINISTER OF JUSTICE AND PEACE, SERGIO SEVILLA PEREZ

Lynne Groulx, NWAC CEO, met with Vice Minister of Justice and Peace, Sergio Sevilla Perez. She discussed the importance of self determination and autonomy to the success and happiness of all Indigenous Peoples. She presented NWACs social innovation model as a means to build independence through social and economic entrepreneurship. She also stressed the importance of facilitating continuous dialogue between Indigenous People and policy makers. This includes centering and amplifying Indigenous perspectives, rights and needs at decision making tables so that their voices may be heard.



VICE MINISTER OF JUSTICE AND PEACE, SERGIO SEVILLA PEREZ

The Deputy Minister is responsible for facilitating government dialogue with local Indigenous populations including discussions regarding territories and land recovery for Indigenous Peoples. The Ministry of Justice and Peace guides a Mechanism for Consultation with Indigenous Peoples, in different territories around Costa Rica such as, Maleku, Boruca, Rey Curre, Ujarras and Zapaton.





MEETING WITH DEPUTY SONIA ROJAS

In a meeting with Deputy Sonia Rojas, the first Indigenous Deputy in Costa Rica's history, NWAC CEO Lynne Groulx talked about the organisation's connections with the Americas, particularly with SICA countries. Additionally, she explained NWAC's business model which seeks to alleviate economic marginalization among Indigenous people. Lynne Groulx congratulated the Deputy on her appointment, recognising the significance of this milestone, and thanked her for arranging her itinerary to visit Indigenous territories and the southern region of Costa Rica.

Deputy Sonia Rojas is one of fifty-seven Deputies in The Legislative Assembly who hold their positions on behalf of the Nation and are elected by provinces. Deputies serve a four-year term and are not eligible for consecutive re-election.



VISIT TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

NWAC representatives had the opportunity to visit Costa Rica's new legislative assembly building by Lemay, which has been designed to mirror the country's landscapes and numerous volcanic mountains. Lynne Groulx was particularly interested in learning more about the women who have been elected to serve.



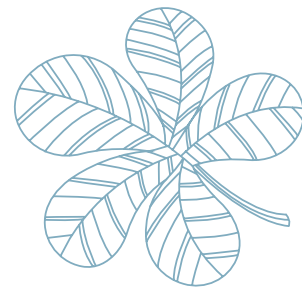
TUESDAY 18

MEETING WITH ALCALDE OF BUENOS AIRES, JOSE ROJAS MENDEZ

Lynne Groulx met with Mayor Jose Rojas from the Municipality of Buenos Aires. Jose Rojas is the first Indigenous municipal Mayor of the canton of Buenos Aires. He is a descendant of the Bribri ethnic group and the Uni wak Clan and also a descendant of the Bruncaj.

Buenos Aires has nine districts and five Indigenous ethnic groups (Cabecar, Bribris, Broran, Bruncaj, Ngäbe-Buglé) distributed in seven Indigenous territories with a territorial extension of two thousand three hundred and eighty-four square kilometers.

Lynne and Mayor Jose Rojas talked about the importance of education and economic opportunities as well as the shared struggles Indigenous populations face regarding territory and human rights.



MEETING WITH THE COSTA RICAN COMMISSION OF THE ARTISANAL SECTOR

Lynne Groulx, CEO of NWAC had the opportunity to meet with representatives from The Costa Rican Commission of the Artisanal Sector, as well as Indigenous women entrepreneurs that hold the Costa Rican Artisan Seal.

The Costa Rican Commission of the Artisanal Sector is composed of:

1. The Ministry of Economy, Industry and Commerce (MEIC).
2. The Ministry of Culture and Youth (MCJ).
3. The Costa Rican Tourism Institute (ICT).
4. The National Learning Institute (INA).

Joining Lynne Groulx in attendance were:

- Ronald Mejías, who oversees the Handicraft Promotion and Improvement Program at MEIC.
- Fraya Corrales, in charge of international cooperation at MEIC.
- Natalia Bolanos, from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The Ministry of Economy, Industry and Commerce, with support of the Ministry of Culture and Youth, the Costa Rican Tourism Institute and the National Learning Institute have worked together to encourage more artisans to create and sell their Costa Rican handicrafts promoting the high-quality product characteristics of identity, quality, design, and adequate environmental practices as well as providing economic opportunities for Indigenous people in the region.

COSTA RICAN ARTISAN SEAL

The Costa Rican Artisan Seal was developed with the aim of helping local artisans who have been impacted by the increase in foreign imitations of Costa Rican crafts. Therefore, this seal guarantees the authenticity of the piece and, in addition, gives added value to the country's artisan products.



CRAFTS WITH IDENTITY – “ARTESANIAS CON IDENTIDAD”

Since 2011, the Costa Rican Tourism Board, through the Touristic Planning and Development Direction, has developed a strategy to promote Costa Rican cultural heritage, through a training program called “Crafts with Identity” where artisans assemble their own design line creating top quality products that allow visitors to take an authentic Costa Rican handicraft home from their travels.



VISIT TO STORE ARTESANIAS CON IDENTIDAD AND CHIETON MOREN

The group then accompanied Lynne Groulx and Tania Molina to the stores Artesanias con Identidad and Chieton Moren where they met with ten businesswomen who are part of the Costa Rican Artisan Seal and Crafts with Identity program who shared their experiences and exhibited their products.

Chieton Moren is a space where local Indigenous artisans can exhibit their products, directly without intermediaries. More than 250 artisans participate in the Chieton Moren Museum and Market each of them exhibiting their original and unique works. The inventory has more than 3500 different products.



The Chieton Moren Museum and Market also offers workshops on a monthly basis, where artisans belonging to one of the 18 Indigenous territories with which the museum works, teach people their regional crafts. The association also offers talks and discussions on native populations of Costa Rica, facilitated by Indigenous people specialized in the subject.



RECEPTION HOSTED BY THE CANADIAN AMBASSADOR IN COSTA RICA

Elizabeth Williams, the Canadian Ambassador in Costa Rica hosted a reception in honour of NWAC's visit to Costa Rica. During her speech the Ambassador recognised the important work that NWAC undertakes to support Indigenous Peoples across the Americas.

Elizabeth Williams is Canada's new ambassador for the countries of Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Honduras. Ambassador Williams holds a Bachelor of Law from the University of Moncton and a Bachelor of Education from the University of Alberta. She speaks English, French and Arabic.

Ambassador Williams has served six assignments abroad: Amman, Jordan, as Second Secretary; in Baghdad, Iraq, as Head of Cooperation; as the first Secretary of Legal and Congressional Affairs in Washington DC; as the first political secretary in Beirut, Lebanon, and more recently as Human Rights Adviser at the Permanent Mission to the United Nations in Geneva.

In attendance was also The Government of the Republic appointed Commissioner for Social Inclusion, Ricardo Sosa.

Photo Note: The commissioner is the presidential commissioner for Social Inclusion of the Government of the Republic, Ricardo Sosa.





WEDNESDAY 19

The mission continued to the south of the country with a visit to Buenos Aires. Buenos Aires is the fourth largest canton in Costa Rica. It is known as the birthplace of Indigenous Territories, as it encompasses seven Indigenous areas: Ujaras, Salitre, Cabagra, Terraba, Rey Curre, Boruca, and Ngäbe-Buglé de Costo Brus, which is home to five Indigenous ethnic groups including Cabecar, Bribris, Broran, Bruncaj, and Ngäbe-Buglé.

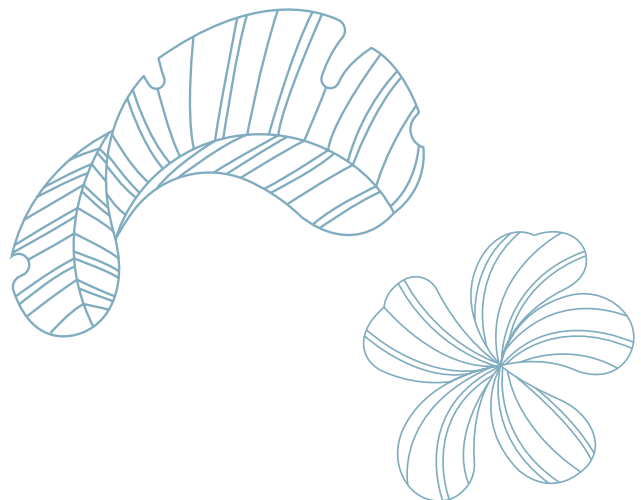


MEETING WITH GRACIELA NÚÑEZ MARCHENA, NATIONAL COORDINATOR OF THE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT OFFICE OF BUENOS AIRES

Lynne Groulx met with Graciela Núñez Marchena, an Indigenous woman and the National Coordinator of the Local Development Office of Buenos Aires. At their meeting they discussed the exchange of experiences and Graciela Núñez Marchena said she aims to replicate the success model of NWAC in Buenos Aires.

INDIGENOUS FAIR

Women entrepreneurs from different Indigenous Territories in Buenos Aires came to display their work at Buenos Aires Park. Lynne Groulx was able to meet with these artisans, exchange practices and shop at the handicraft fair.



INTERVIEW AT MIFUTE

Lynne Groulx was interviewed by Eduardo Rojas, the Director of MIFUTE.

MIFUTE is an Indigenous movement that represents Indigenous Peoples outside of their territories.

During the interview, they discussed NWAC's visit to the country. Lynne Groulx was able to emphasize the importance of social innovation and her desire to empower women to become self-sufficient and independent. She mentioned that NWAC acts as a social innovation centre and her goal is to expand the concept globally, opening centres in various countries to facilitate governments in providing tools for Indigenous women. They addressed potential challenges small business owners and artisans may face regarding a lack of available resources and training. This was an opportunity to workshop solutions and ways forward to ensure Indigenous entrepreneurs have access to the infrastructure and technology (including reliable internet service) they need to succeed.

Photo note:

Lynne and Eduardo Rojas Director of MIFUTE
<https://www.facebook.com/mifutecr>





THURSDAY 20

Travelling into San Antonio, Lynne Groulx was able to attend fairs where Indigenous women entrepreneurs from the Ngäbe-Buglé community exhibited their handicrafts. The women artisans she met included expert weavers, dress and hat makers, and craftspeople who create and sell products that are crucial to their family income and help build the long-term success of their communities.

"Indigenous women's craftwork is not just skilled art, it's a tool of economic empowerment."

Lynne Groulx, CEO of NWAC

FAIR IN ALTO CONTE

This market was an opportunity to view examples of art and traditional handicrafts from the Indigenous Territory Ngäbe-Buglé of Conte Burica. Lynne Groulx was able to meet with the women artisans, discuss their methods and process and view items for sale.

NGÄBE-BUGLÉ INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY IN ALTOS DE SAN ANTONIO

Lynne Groulx also visited other members of the Ngäbe-Buglé Indigenous Community in Altos de San Antonio where women entrepreneurs prepared a fair for her.

The Comarca Ngäbe-Buglé is approximately 2,500 square miles, encompassing areas of the three westernmost provinces of Panamá: Bocas del Toro, Chiriqui and Veraguas.



During her visit she met many community members including Indigenous teachers in Alto Conte and Mr. Pio Bejarano, Medicine Keeper and Botanist from the Ngäbe-Buglé community. She also met Julissa Monterrosa, a young woman who plans to study sciences at the University of Costa Rica.



VISIT TO PARQUE LAS ESFERAS

Lynne Groulx visited Parque Las Esferas, to gain insight into the Indigenous Territories of Costa Rica.

Parque las esferas is an archaeological site featuring large spheres, about 20 to 30 metres in diameter thought to date back to the 7th century AD. The spheres placement and purpose are still a matter of debate among academics although some theories include their possible use as astronomy tools to plot the position of the stars, or territory markers.

Many of the stones are made from a material called gabbro, similar to coarse basalt. Some are made from limestone and sandstone, but all have been hammered and polished to perfection.



FRIDAY 21

On the return to San Jose, Lynne Groulx was able to view more examples of authentic local Indigenous art and handicrafts, creating possible business connections to develop trading opportunities with local Indigenous people.



CONCLUSION

This mission to Costa Rica continues NWACs essential work building relationships across the Americas to benefit issues central to the Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, transgender, and gender-diverse people we serve. Through meetings with government officials and exchanges with Indigenous groups and local entrepreneurs, NWAC was able to source goods to potentially sell in our Artisanelle store and make connections and strengthen networks with individual craftspeople.

During this trip NWAC also negotiated a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Native Women's Association of Canada and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Costa Rica. This is an important milestone of collaboration between the two organisations.

These agreements aim to develop and promote the economic prosperity of Indigenous entrepreneurs, and their communities across many regions.

Our CEO, Lynne Groulx also made plans for future events and collaborations including the possibility of a youth project focused on agriculture and wood workshops.

Our international advocacy boosts our global reputation and elevates important conversations that keep the rights and interests of Indigenous people in the consciousness of decision and policymakers across the world.

SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS



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