Indigenous youth sue Peruvian State, demanding Truth Commission for the Amazon "Rubber Boom" crimes

Young indigenous descendants from Peru's Amazon are demanding truth and justice for the atrocities of the "Rubber boom" — a period of enslavement and mass killings that devastated their ancestors. Their lawsuit seeks to compel the state to confront a century of silence and create a Truth Commission to restore memory, dignity, and historical justice.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 13, 2025

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LORETO, Peru – In an unprecedented legal battle against historical amnesia, a group of young indigenous leaders has filed a lawsuit against the State of Peru, demanding the creation of a Truth Commission to investigate the systematic crimes committed against Amazonian peoples during the notorious "Rubber Boom" era.

More than a century has passed since the end of this dark period in Peruvian history (1880-1920), when an economic boom was built on the blood of Indigenous peoples. It is estimated that at least 30,000 indigenous people were exterminated by the brutal practices of "rubber barons" ("Señores del caucho" in Spanish), yet the state has never launched an official investigation into the atrocities.

Now, a collective of approximately 30 young indigenous people has turned to the courts to demand their fundamental right to truth—the right to know what happened to their ancestors.

On Monday, October 13, 2025, the youth collective, known as Tsiuni—a word meaning "to listen" in the Kukama language—filed a *hábeas corpus* petition with the Superior Court of Justice of Loreto. Their goal is to compel the government to finally and formally investigate the extermination, violence, slavery, torture and death that their peoples endured.

"We organized ourselves out of pain," the collective declared in a public statement. "A pain that demands justice, and a justice that is a path to healing and ensuring this is never repeated. More than 100 years ago, our grandparents, our parents, our aunts, our uncles, and the generations that came before them, were victims of a wave of extermination, violence, slavery, and arbitrary killings."

The Tsiuni Collective is composed of 30 young members from ten indigenous peoples, including the Kukama, Maijuna, Secoya, Murui, Bora, Tikuna, Awajún, Arabela, Achuar, and Wampis. The group was born from a demand to uncover a forgotten part of Peru's past, a history that remains invisible in the official narrative and is omitted from school textbooks. This, despite historical and anthropological studies estimating that between 30,000 and 100,000 indigenous people in the Amazon were killed by rubber industry exploiters.

The lawsuit's legal foundation is the "right to truth," a fundamental right recognized by Peru's Constitutional Court for over two decades. This right affirms that all Peruvians, both individually and collectively, have the right to know the truth about grave human rights violations, to learn from the past and ensure that those crimes are never again repeated (guarantees of no repetition).

For the Tsiuni Collective, this fight is not just about the past. They see a direct line between the historical violence and the threats they face today.

"Violence is cyclical in the Amazon; it has never stopped and continues to operate in the same way, at the hands of companies and powerful groups, and a complicit and criminal state," the collective stated, referencing the modern extractive industries that continue to threaten Indigenous rights and the environment.

They also point to the actions of current government officials who celebrate the "boom" times, such as the governor of Loreto, who in May 2024 inaugurated a "Rubber Walk" (“Paseo del Caucho” in Spanish) in Iquitos as a festive tourist and commercial zone.

With their legal action now underway, these young Indigenous leaders hope for a favorable ruling from the judiciary in the coming months, one that will eventually lead to the Government of Peru to establish a long-overdue Truth Commission.

At stake is their right to know the history of their peoples and their families—which is, ultimately, their own history and the history of all Peruvians.