Our Land, Our Survival: Communities Mobilizing Against Land Grabbing and Dispossession

Amber Khan: [00:00:00] Hello, everyone. Good morning

Good afternoon, good evening from wherever you're calling in from. Uh, my name is Amber Khan, and I am a disaster researcher at the University of Washington in Seattle in the US. Um, and thank you for joining us today for this webinar today titled Our Land, Our Survival: Communities Mobilizing Against Land Grabbing and Dispossession.

Um, this is hosted by the International Center for Community Land Trusts, and this webinar comes at a very timely point. Across the world, communities are facing accelerating disasters, heightened militarization, tech extraction, um, through the promise of artificial intelligence, green capitalism, and land grabs.

And this moment really calls for thinking creatively, hearing successes in the movement for land justice, and connecting with organizers, researchers, advocates, and community members across the world who are resisting against the current status quo. So today we'll have Spanish interpretation, um, as well as translati- translation to over 60 languages through a Zoom add-on, um, called Worldly.

And then if you have any questions today during the panel, you can use the question and answer, the Q&A function. Um, we have an amazing lineup of speakers today from Canada, Belgium, Barbuda, and Puerto Rico. Um, Leilani Farha will start the webinar off for us today, and Leilani is the global director of The Shift, an international movement to secure the right to housing.

She served as a United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing from 2014 to 2020. And as a lawyer and global advocate, her work focuses on housing as a human right and confronting the [00:02:00] financialization of housing and land. Um, Leilani, I'll pass it to you for your introduction.

Leilani Farha: Thanks so much, Amber, and thank you for inviting me in to what I think may be one of the most important conversations that we should be having right now.

And what I'm gonna do with my few minutes is just to sort of set the stage in a really zoomed out way, just to talk about where we're at globally with respect to land. And I mean, it, it will come as no surprise to you that I might begin with the idea of empire. And I'm not sure we ever left the age of empire, to be honest.

I live in a country, Canada, um, that is a colonial nation based in land theft, um, and the dispossession of indigenous peoples from their homes and lands, and that has continued to the present and continues to the present. What I think we're witnessing right now- Is an unabashed- Uh- ... a very bald, um, uh, colonial moment.

Um, maybe like one we haven't seen for some time. And the starkness of it, the brazenness of it is shocking, at least to me. And I thought I would just take you through some examples. You all know them, but l- let's, let's visit a few places around the world. Uh, we can look at Palestine and Gaza, uh, at the top.

Um, with- without getting into the history of Israel's colonization and takeover with the support of the United States and other Western nations of the entire Palestinian territories, if we just look at Gaza post October 7, 2023, we see that Israel is now controlling 64% of the lands there, and they have a variety of mechanisms to do so.

If we look at Greenland and the threats the United States has made to take over Greenland, we'll see again a colonial grabbing. If we look at Venezuela and Iran, again, imperialist takeovers of land in both of those places through aggression. And so the question is, like, what's this all about? And we know very clearly in each of those places, Gaza, Greenland, Venezuela, Iran, what's on offer to colonialists and empire are natural resources in particular.

And, um, I mean, Gaza, off the coast of Gaza, there's natural gas. Greenland has special minerals. Uh, Venezuela and Iran are big oil-producing nations. And on top of that, many of these places are strategically located with ports that allow for trade routes. And so empire is going after both the resources, the land, and the strategic position so that they can control, uh, supply chains.

And so it's a very scary and stark moment. If you look at where all those places are situated geographically, we end up kind of with the world, and I've only mentioned some of the places [00:06:00] under siege, of course. And so- Um, what I, what interests me, uh, my work and what kind of animates me is, you know, who is behind this?

And we're so often pointing our fingers at governments, and we should. The United States, the United Kingdom, um, many parts of Western Europe, um, r- and Israel, and, and, and that ecosystem of nations. But the ecosystem is broader than that, we all know, so, and, and almost now inseparable. So the actors, we have governments we've identified.

We have investors, financial firms, banks, and real estate cap- capital, and they all operate in a coordinated system. And why I said they, you cannot differentiate, if you look at, for example, the peace [00:07:00] board, I c- I'm choking on the words. The peace board established by, uh, Donald Trump to oversee the future of Gaza, completely obscene, but who is on that peace board?

What you'll see, just dig a little, just, just Google the names of some of the people. M- many of them have deep ties to real estate. Many of them were super active in the global financial crisis in taking over people's homes and making people poorer. And so we have this ecosystem working together, and their modus operandi is to determine basically who counts and who doesn't, and it is Black and brown people the world over who, people in the Global South, who do not count, especially where they are perceived as obstacles to land and [00:08:00] resources.

People living on the land with historic ties to the land, indigenous peoples in particular to the land, are viewed as obstacles to empire, no different than the colonial era. And so when those people are perceived as such, they are stereotyped, discriminated against, denigrated, treated as inferior and disposable, and there is a culture around that.

Make these people seem other and like they don't belong. It's a, it's an in- um, inversion of the truth. And so then you can get rid of those people with no public complaint, and move in and exploit and extract their land and their resources So it's a bleak place we're in right now because, not just [00:09:00] because this is happening, but as I said, because this is happening with impunity.

And I mean, I think you all know on the call I'm the former UN Special Rapporteur, but I'm an international human rights lawyer by training, by profession. I have long been wedded to international human rights law as an accountability mechanism, as a response to extractive industries, as a response to empire, as a way to curtail rights violations.

And I have to admit that the system that I have myself been part of, that I have, that I believe in, in terms of the human rights, the right to housing, the right not

to be forcibly removed from your home and lands, the right not to be displaced, the right not to be ethnically cleansed, the [00:10:00] right of indigenous peop- rights of indigenous peoples to free, prior, and informed consent before any decision is taken about their lands, I believe in all of those rights.

But the system is not functioning. It is not holding anyone to account i- within that ecosystem. It is not holding governments to account, it is not holding investors and banks and the private sector to account for human rights. And so it's clear to me, and you'll hear this expression, I think, around these days, that it is up to us The people.

Change always comes from the ground up. We know that. People's movements, people's rights claiming. I have seen this countless times, including in Puerto Rico, for example, where we're gonna, we're gonna hear from Mario, um, [00:11:00] uh, in a few moments. So it is up to us and, and, um, it's not to say from my perspective we should abandon human rights, but rather it's up to us to animate human rights, to show what human rights means, to, uh, insist on human rights in our movements and from the ground.

And only once we start doing that, and do- we have to start connecting our movements more, and that's why community land trusts are so important, because there is emerging a global movement of community land trusts. We have to start connecting our movements more so that we can actually push back against empire.

And the last thing I'll say with my 30 seconds is um, I think it should be clear [00:12:00] why community land trusts and cooperatives and other alternative ways of organizing ownership of land and use of land, why it's so powerful is because it is so disruptive. It is disruptive to the extractive capitalist system we find ourselves in.

I g- actually call it neo-financialized capitalism, where w- or some people will just call it post-capitalism. But these sorts of movements completely disrupt that frame that has been imposed on us, that takes away from us our ability to participate in democracies. And so even though it is difficult to imagine scaled community land trusts, scaled cooperatives, et cetera- They are disruptive, [00:13:00] and if we can connect these movements, I think that we really will be able to challenge empire.

Thank you, and I will end my comments there

Amber Khan: Thanks so much, Leilani. Um, yeah, thank you for grounding us in this really dystopian moment, if I can use that word, um, and for this call to action. I especially really resonate with this piece about connection, um, and centering human rights in the community land trust movement and the cooperative movement, but really more broadly, this is about land justice, right?

Um, so next I'll introduce, uh, Dr. Line Algoed. Um, Line is a researcher and an educator at VUB in Brussels, Belgium. Um, her work focuses on [00:14:00] land governance, climate justice, and community-led resistance to displacement, examining how communal and collective land systems function as tools of protection and self-determination in context marked by disaster, speculation, and extractive development.

Um, and a fun fact is that Line, uh, her papers were one of the first ones I read when I was getting interested in this community land trust movement, so she's kind of an academic crush for me in some ways, but also a colleague. Um, Line, I'll let you take it away. Thank you so much, Amber, uh, for this wonderful introduction.

Line Algoed: Thank you so much, Leilani, as well for everything you said. Um, I feel completely fired up. Uh, I feel, uh, angry and very hopeful at the same time. Indeed, as Amber said, the connection is what we need, and this is, uh, this is exactly what we're doing right now. I am going to try to share my, um, slides. See if that works.

Uh, pa-pa. [00:15:00] Is this working? Okay, cool. Well, thank you so much everyone for tuning in, uh, today. It's really an honor for me to be here and to be surrounded by these incredible, incredibly inspiring people. Um, I will today talk briefly about the book that we recently published, um, at, uh, Terra Nostra Press, uh, Our Land, Our Survival, which is based on the, on my PhD research, uh, that I did in the last, uh, let's say 10 years or so.

Um, the communities at the center of this book, they are here with us today, Barbuda and, uh, the Canó Martin Peña Community Land Trust, uh, in Puerto Rico, and they are exactly doing what Leilani refi- referred to. They're really fighting against land grabbing. They're coming up with ways, you know, like, to resist this land grabbing.

Um, and specifically, the land grabbing that we see is happening after climate-related disasters. [00:16:00] Um, for centuries, and this is also something Leilani said, communities have been engaged in struggles, uh, to defend their

land from many people wanting to take it. This is not just something of the past, of course.

Land grabbing is happening today in literally every corner of the world, the entire planet. It's affecting an estimated 227 million hectares, but it's probably more. And indeed, land grabbing is about governments, but not only, also multinational corporations, foreign investment firms buying up very large pieces of lands, um, aiming at expanding land markets, and often further disadvantaging already marginalized communities.

And it's happening at such a scale that can, we can really speak of a global land rush. And it often happens after disasters strike, as [00:17:00] communities are dealing with the aftermaths of these disasters. Recovery processes of the disasters may even be used, they may even facilitate these types of disaster capitalism, and this is something that we describe at length in the book.

But communities are resisting, and the book, Our Land, Our Survival, focuses on two communities that are fighting this. They're both in the Caribbean, and they've mobilized their collective land tenure systems to stop lands from being taken away. And it's the Canó Martin Peña Community Land Trust in Puerto Rico, represented here today by Mario Núñez Mercado, and the island of Barbuda, represented here today by Jackie Frank.

Here is a map that shows the location of the islands for those who are not familiar with the Caribbean But first of all, let's take a step back, um, because we take it so for granted that land is something that can [00:18:00] be bought, that land is something that we can own. This idea of private property of land has become so much a part of how our world works.

But actually, when we really look at it, more than 50%, more of, more than half of the world's surface is not privately owned. Private property is definitely the dominant way of organizing land, but it's not universal. More than half of the world's lands are collectively owned by about 2.5 billion people, and these people protect crucial biodiversity and thus help the planet from warming up even more.

But only about 10% of this land is today officially recognized, and that leaves about one-third of the world's population vulnerable to dispossession, to land grabs So let's take even a bigger step back. Um, [00:19:00] Leilani also referred to it, but many scholars are framing climate change as a contemporary manifestation of something that was started, or at least accelerated about 500 years ago with colonization.

And that is the destruction of the Earth, the destruction of nature, of land, for the benefit of a very small group of people who benefit financially from it. The Martinican scholar, Malcolm Ferdinand, called this colonial inhabitation. And that small group of beneficiaries that is benefiting from the destruction of the Earth is today as active as it has ever been, and we see that happening around the world in literally every corner of the planet, as Leilani said.

Also, in Barbuda and Puerto Rico. And this is why I conducted my research that the book is based on from a theoretical framework of decolonial thought. Decolonial [00:20:00] scholars critically examine the influence of colonialism on contemporary practices such as private property or climate change. I also conducted my research from a feminist perspective, because we see that colonialism, colonization brought a shift from a more woman-centered or a more feminist view of nature and land, Madre Tierra, Mother Earth, right?

Land as reproduction, as necessary for life itself. Land as Survival, the title of the book, um, to a much more mechanistic idea of land as mere property, mere resources, something to produce value to make money off, right? The communities that I worked with have a very different notion of the importance of land, and we see communities standing up to defend these non-mechanistic ideas of [00:21:00] relating to the land I conducted my research using an insurgent participatory action research, um, approach, which is based on Insurgent Research, uh, a paper by Adam Gaudry.

And so insurgent researchers, um, they are those who are looking for alternatives to the oppressive colonial status quo. We don't hide this objective, and that is liberation from that status quo. And all through my research, my primary responsibility was therefore not with academia, but with the communities that I work with.

It's to them that I'm primarily accountable to. "Nothing for us without us," as the T-shirt says, of one of the South African participants in one of the exchanges that we organized in Puerto Rico with the Caño CLT, and they were, that were part of my action research. So now I'm very, gonna very briefly [00:22:00] introduce the two communities, but Jackie and Mario will talk much more about them, uh, later.

Um, so first of all, the Caño Martín Peña Community Land Trust. Um, the community land trust in the Caño Martín Peña in Puerto Rico is the result of thousands of residents living in what is called informal settlements surrounding the Martín Peña waterway in downtown San Juan, the capital of Puerto Rico.

So they were built informally, meaning without legal land ownership when they settled there, when they arrived in the 1930s or 1940s. Today, about 22, 24,000 people still live in the Martin Peña area. The area is urbanized, streets are paved, there is electricity, but the area lacks an adequate sewage system.

And that means that wa- wastewater goes directly into the waterway, and that has polluted [00:23:00] the waterway so much that it's now blocked, flooding large parts of the, of the streets regularly. And so in the early 2000s, in the, uh, in the area, residents started demanding the restoration of this waterway, the ecological restoration of the mangrove waterway.

And residents at that time still did not have formal ownership of the land, but they had lived on it for more than six decades. So these residents, after a very long and, and very deep process of community meetings, decided that they needed to create a mechanism that would allow them to remain in the community while at the same time benefit from the improvements of the infrastructure project.

And so what they came up with is groundbreaking in many ways. So groundbreaking that it actually led them to winning the prestigious World's [00:24:00] Habitat Awards in 2016, which was actually given to them by none other than Leilani Farha in Quito in 2016. So they created a community land trust, um, but it's different than other community land trusts.

So most people, I'm sure, in this webinar, they know what a community land trust is. But so they are instruments that separate homeownership from landownership As you can see in this graph, homes are individually owned, but the land is collectively owned by the community. Each family individually holds surface rights to their plots, but the land can never be sold.

And this is how the land in these neighborhoods was then collectively regularized. So now it's not informal anymore. That's a cur- that's, uh, that's not the right word to use anymore when we talk about the Martin Peña area. The housing there already [00:25:00] existed, and thousands of people already lived there, and that's actually the main difference from many CLTs in Europe or the US.

This is what the canyo looked like the day after Hurricane Maria struck in 2017. Many people were affected. Many houses were affected. But the hurricane, as we often see, was also an opportunity for the government to get people to leave the many self-built neighborhoods. Because the lands of these communities, of course, had become very strategic, very valuable.

The government was trying to use this hurricane to get to these lands. The then governor of Puerto Rico said, "It's time to go. Leave the self-built neighborhoods." Right? It was really suggested when he said that, that having such valuable land inhabited by low-income communities is not unlocking the full potential [00:26:00] of the land, right?

But the community land trust protected residents, as they could pro- prove collective ownership of the land, and this is at length described by myself and my co-authors, um, in the book So then briefly about Barbuda. Barbuda is unique. It's had, had communal land ownership of the entire island since the British abolition of slavery in 1834, so for several centuries.

It was ratified in the Barbuda Land Act in 2007. That act states that all land in Barbuda is owned in common by the people of Barbuda, and that land shall not be sold. So unlike most other Caribbean islands, Barbuda's coastline is preserved. This is thanks to the centuries of communal land ownership, right?

The com- the small population [00:27:00] controls what happens with the land. Residents are very aware of the importance of the beaches, not only because they're beautiful, as you can see on this slide, um, but also because they s- they act as protection. Protection from hurricanes, from storms, from floods, any other events related to climate change.

And the same goes for the dunes and the wetlands. But again, the hurricane in 2017 was the opportunity for the Twin States central government and its economic allies to try to privatize the land and invite foreign investors to build luxury real estate, making Barbudans even more vulnerable to withstand severe weather events, and we've termed this process vulnerabilization Barbudans are of course not letting this happen.

They're resisting this rent mobilization, this disaster capitalism. Jackie will tell, talk [00:28:00] about it. It happens on an everyday basis. People are there trying to take what's theirs. I want to quickly end this presentation with some of the conclusions that are described in the book, but here I'll just mention a few.

Um, how can we see communal land tenure then as climate action, right? So from my interviews with community leaders, residents, staff, these are some of the conclusions that we drew. Communities living with communal land had a stronger communi- community organization at its base, base, and that community organization allowed, um, community-led disaster preparation.

It allowed mutual aid during the disaster and mutual community-led recovery just after. This happens, for example, through collective responses to policies, policies that perp- perpetuate vulnerability, [00:29:00] and through legal avenues, for example, to defend community land rights, as well as through the preservations of, preservation of natural environments.

So ultimately, these communities promote a radically different imaginary of land that I think we can all learn from. Land not as profit, but land as necessary for survival of all species in the face of this climate emergency. I'm gonna end the, uh, here, but these stories of resistance of extractivism not only of resources, but also of landscapes, um, the extractivism of ways of life, of ways of knowing, right, show that protecting land, nature, biodiversity, and confronting climate change are inseparable struggles.

The book is dedicated to all the lands and environmental defenders such as the late George Jeffrey in Barbuda. [00:30:00] I just want to finish as I always do by acknowledging that all these ideas are based on the struggles of the thousands of residents and their allies at the Cano CLT and Barbuda. So please follow them on social media, and thank you so much for your attention.

Great. Shall I, Amber, shall I introduce, uh, the speakers? Yeah. Okay. So now it is my great pleasure to introduce to you, um, two of these land defenders that I mentioned. First of all, there is Jackie Frank. She is a community leader. She's an ad- advocate at the Barbuda Land Rights and Resources commu- uh, Committee.

Um, following the devastation of Hurricane Irma in 2017, she became heavily involved in efforts to protect Barbuda's centuries-old system of collective land [00:31:00] ownership from privatization and external, external development pressures. And then secondly, there is Mario Núñez Mercado, my great friend in Puerto Rico.

He's the executive director of the Fideicomiso de la Tierra del Caño Martín Peña and of Corporación del Proyecto Enlace del Caño Martín Peña. He has been deeply involved for decades, Mario, maybe you can tell us how long exactly, in the community's struggle to secure collective land tenure as a foundation for environmental restoration, housing stability, and self-determination.

Thank you so much, both of you, for being here today. I really appreciate it, and I'm really happy to, uh, to see you again. And as we agreed, I'm gonna ask you some questions just to guide our conversation. Um, and my first question is

really gonna be quite broad, because I know I spoke very briefly and very [00:32:00] quickly, and also my research is already a little while ago now.

Um, so I wanted to know from you if you can share any updates of what is cur- currently happening in Puerto Rico and in Barbuda. Um, Jackie, maybe I can start with you.

Jackie Frank: Okay. Um, good day, everyone, and thank you, Lena, for this opportunity to share our story in Barbuda. Um, currently there is a lot of focus on land.

At the end of April, there was a general election in Antigua and Barbuda, and the prime minister's party won almost all of the seats, and their focus has always been on how to get the lands of Barbuda away from the Barbudans. So since the election, there's been, there have been a lot of pronouncements in the media along the lines of, um, [00:33:00] the Barbudans are going to have to have a land registry and we're, the government are in charge of it.

That's not so. Um, the council are not involved because Barbuda is run under a local government system, which is the Barbuda Council. They are quite wide-ranging powers that we have, and those powers are actually embedded in the Constitution of Antigua and Barbuda. So the council itself is a very powerful governing body.

But the government chooses to ignore, ignore that and Is focused almost solely on wrest- wrestling the lands away from Barbudans and encouraging outside in- investors. Take today for an example. I received a phone call to say that there are Chinese surveyors on the land work with a member of the, the opposition government.

This happened last week as well, and we went out. I went [00:34:00] out this morning and it was the same thing. They're in the same place, and they're, um, when the Chinese saw us, they walked away. Um, but the, the, the person representing the government stayed and talked to us and spoke to us in a way they're trying to convince us what they were doing, giving up this land or taking the land was a good thing for us.

Even though we have had no input in that decision, and the laws of Antigua and Barbuda, different laws say that there should be input from the general public, from our Planning Act to the Escazu Agreement, which we signed up to in 2018. Um, so what the Barbudan people want is generally the practices do it to

them first and then they'll, they'll fall in line afterwards according to the government.

So that's ... We're still fighting that. And then [00:35:00] environmentally, a similar thing was done with another investor, and their development is more on the coast and the c- the coast has been damaged in the sense that there is no more gradual, um, sand going into the sea. Now it's just a drop, like a cliff. It's been washed away because they used geo bags.

Um, and then as a result of that as well, the air, the construction of the airport, I believe has altered the way the water runs on the land, so when it rains, there's a lot more flooding. Um, and roads, some roads are impassable. So this so-called development is having a negative environmental effect in Barbuda.

And we are still ex- we're experiencing some restrictions with regards to our access to the beaches as well, um, where people go and celebrate or camp out. [00:36:00] So little by little it appears that the government here are giving away our land that we've always lived on and lived with in order to survive on Barbuda.

Line Algoed: The struggle continues. Mario, nos puedes contar un poquito lo que está pasando en Puerto Rico ahora y en El Caño específico?

Mario Núñez: Can you hear me? Is the sound working? Yes. Good morning again, everyone. This is Mario Núñez Mercado, director of the Fideicomiso de la Tierra del Caño Martín Peña and resident of the Las Monjas community. I'm a bit of a historian, so we need to go back — back to the historical moment. From our first inhabitants, the Taíno people, through the Spanish colonization process, from 1493 to 1898, Puerto Rico was governed by Spain in a colonial relationship. That relationship in 1898 only changed actors, because the colonial relationship continued — now under the government of the United States of America.

So we have been under colonial rule for 533 years on the island of Puerto Rico, which has not allowed the island to evolve and move toward the degree of independence the country so urgently needs. We are subjugated, as is obvious, to the policies of the federal government and the policies of the local government of Puerto Rico.

As Line just noted, Puerto Rico suffered the effects of a hurricane in 2017 — Hurricane María — which seriously affected the vast majority of the island. We were without power for more than six months, without water service. That reality persists in the country today due to aqueduct problems. Many families — today we have more than 150,000 households that do not have potable water service due to breakdowns, lack of maintenance, and our dependence on the United States government. So the community organization within Caño Martín Peña allowed the communities to recover.

One thousand — one thousand structures were seriously affected out of the eight thousand structures in Caño Martín Peña. That is a very high percentage — almost 15%, a little more

than that, of residents. This also led many of those families to leave the district, to move in with relatives, either elsewhere in Puerto Rico or in the United States, and recovery for those families didn't happen until a couple of years ago, when families began returning to the district.

In terms of the state — the state, like the vast majority, and as Jackie was saying, governments are not allies or collaborators. On the contrary, what they promote is the disintegration and displacement of communities. We are well aware of the policies of President Donald Trump. He does not recognize the effects of climate change, does not acknowledge that situation of vulnerability.

But having an active, effective community organization allows people to move, to find solutions, and to cut somewhat that dependence we have. We entered hurricane season on June 1st. As you know, we are in the Caribbean — neighbors of Barbuda and Antigua as well, in the sense that we are all Caribbean. And as recently as last Friday, that prompted community leadership to start organizing and working on their emergency management plan for this season, which normally impacts us every year to a greater or lesser degree — whether through rain, through wind, or because a hurricane hits us directly.

So having active community organizations allows us to find solutions that break somewhat with that dependence on the state, because the state's response is not always immediate. In the case of Caño Martín Peña, with Hurricane María, it wasn't until thirty days later that the municipality came in to work with the communities. The response from government entities was slow. I think, obviously, the impact was so large that the government had not prepared to manage a situation of that nature. So bringing it back to that point — it is extremely important that our communities stay active.

As I said, the state promotes individualism. That's always been the case. Collective land tenure is not well regarded in governmental circles — though it is by the residents and community members, who embrace it and attend to it, certainly. And as I was saying, after the hurricanes, opportunities arose for the state to try to develop all kinds of things on coastlines and in nature reserves.

The same thing is happening to us now. Right now there is a project in Cabo Rojo called Esencia — a multi-billion-dollar project backed by large foreign economic interests — which is taking over beaches, taking over the best lands, lands that were protected under our territorial planning ordinance and are now being stripped of that protection. There is a policy of the local government of Puerto Rico right now pushing a new planning and permits code that is eliminating all the restrictions those protected lands have — they are being freed up so that large economic interests can take over the country. There is a policy of privatization, of selling off state resources, on a staggering scale. And in that context, the Caño Martín Peña — having a community land trust — is a lock, a barrier against the government being able to dispose of our land.

The communities of Caño Martín Peña are located in a highly privileged area, near the financial district of Hato Rey — what we call the golden mile — near universities, near shopping centers, on avenues with heavy traffic and a collective transit system and an urban train that allows for excellent mobility. So we have always recognized the privileged location of the Caño Martín Peña communities, and I think that's why — obviously — experiences from earlier decades, the fifties, sixties, and seventies, with government policies to eliminate

the informal settlements, opened up the opportunity for us residents of Caño Martín Peña to establish a land trust.

It was something innovative. It was the first time the question was raised of how we were going to address the situation of families who did not have title in the special planning district. We're talking about approximately 400 cuerdas, nearly eight thousand residences or families, of which 52% now have individual title and 48% have collective land tenure — though not all have yet received a surface rights deed. But being within land trust territory already makes them eligible for that benefit — the surface rights deed — which, as Line explained, separates land title from housing title.

Land title within the district is collective — we are all owners. Families that have a structure are entitled to that building or structure title, which allows them to exchange it, sell it, mortgage it, improve their home, move — without losing benefits. Because when a family decides to sell their property, 25% of the value of the land they occupy is added to the appraisal or valuation process, so that having a surface rights deed does not result in a penalty for that family.

One of the important milestones for our land trust — even though the communities always defended it and were clear about it — didn't come until the international recognition of the UN prize, the World Habitat Award, received in Ecuador in 2016. After that recognition and that award, the discourse of governmental institutions shifted somewhat toward acknowledging the model. Before that, we were strongly attacked by the state itself, by the government itself, pushing policies to return the lands to the original agencies and take them away from communities. That was in 2009 — through a legislative process, Law 32 of June 23, 2009. After that, the communities decided to sue the government, claiming just compensation for the lands that had been transferred to us. And in 2013 we pushed an amendment project to Law 489 — Law 114 of May 13, 2013 — which returned the lands to the communities. From there we had all the structures in place for the administration and operation of the land trust, and our process of issuing surface rights deeds began.

A process that has been somewhat difficult, because when the lands were transferred, we were not given the boundaries or perimeter surveys of all the land being transferred to the trust. So we have to do community outreach, work with residents, house-by-house visits to identify families who don't yet have an individual deed so they can obtain their surface rights deed. We are now at 178 surface rights deeds issued, with a membership of more than 250, and we aspire to keep growing over time — because the land trust is a trust in perpetuity.

What this means is that — and we are three entities working within the district, as Line noted — the Corporación del Proyecto Enlace del Caño Martín Peña exists because a governmental entity was needed that could coordinate all the governmental efforts to dredge and channel a body of water that borders the eight communities, four to the north and four to the south, requiring coordination with the federal government, the local government, and the municipal government of San Juan, the city where the special planning district and the Caño Martín Peña communities are located.

We have the land trust, which is a tool — I call it a tool — but it is the private entity with independent legal status, created in perpetuity. And then there is the community-based organization, which is the group of the eight communities adjacent to Caño Martín Peña, from which I came into this leadership role.

And Line was saying I've been at this since 1800 — since 1998, I've been a community leader in my Las Monjas community. I then joined the G8 and was part of creating all three entities from my role as community leader. I'm not an expert — I don't claim that right — but I do claim the right to defend our communities as a resident of Caño Martín Peña.

And I'll say it again: state policies attack residents, attack the most vulnerable populations, ordinary people. There are policies of privatizing beaches, privatizing protected lands and nature reserves — which we are strongly challenging — and there has been a broad defense by communities across the country in defense of the country's resources, fighting against the sale and privatization policies of the current administration.

Line Algoed: Okay. Thank you so much, Mario. Muchisimas gracias. Um, I am going to move on to the second question, and, uh, I think we're gonna keep it very brief now. But the second question is [00:49:00] more related to the importance of having communal land ownership, um, um, communal land tenure, and strong community organization in helping your communities face climate change.

Um, what was the importance of your land system, you would say, in facing climate related challenges? Jackie, maybe we can start with you.

Jackie Frank: Um, our communal land system is, or, and it has been in the past, what has helped us to survive. Originally, the Barbudans, um, as an island, when slavery was finished, nobody really bothered with the Barbudans.

They weren't seen as a threat. The fact that they had the land was ignored, and it wasn't till later on that we were forced into, like a marriage, a partnership with Antigua. And that became formalized in [00:50:00] 1981 when Antigua and Barbuda reluctantly became independent of, um, the UK because we are a Commonwealth colony, so to speak.

And in terms of, um- Our climate, the, the issues with climate and the way things happen on the island, every decision that impacts the island is taken to the community first in a village meeting. Um, so hi- say for instance, historically, um, there was a development that came to the island, and the people had a village meeting about it, and they did not want it, but it, um, other bodies, including the government, were trying to force it on the people.

So Barbudans being Barbudans, they gathered together, they [00:51:00] went to the site of the development, and there were containers up there that contained, um, resources to help build the development, and they pushed the containers

over the cliff, off the cliff to show that they were not going to have that development where they were having it, and that they will be listened to.

And the, because there were concerns of what that development would do to the, the nature of the area where, that they were going to develop. People... What I see is people often come to Barbuda, recognize its beauty, recognize there's lots of green, and the first thing, first few things that come to mind is, "Oh, how can I get some of that?

And why aren't they doing more with it?" And they d- what they don't understand is The island as it stands has supported, um, [00:52:00] financially and through what the g- people can grow. It has supported people in living and raising their families, sending people off to school to train in o- other countries, and we do it in a way that is sympathetic to the island.

We don't take more than we need. Yet when developers come and they extract, they, they, they're not extracting 'cause it needs to be extracted, they're extracting to see how much money they can make from it. So it's only them that benefits. The way that Barbudans live, the whole island benefits, and the, the environment is not endangered or harmed in any way.

Barbudans know which lobsters to take out of the lagoon and which ones to put back. They know which, what size crabs to take out of the crab holes and which ones to [00:53:00] put back. So we live with the land. We don't abuse it, and this, this relationship with the land has enabled us to live harmoniously. When it was Hurricane Irma, I was here when it was my my first ever hurricane.

That was a category five. But what saved us that night was the, the wetlands that we have And c- that was their Ramsar site, level two. And it helped to hold back the water and, um, cut down the wind so it didn't get all the way into the village. That Ramsar site has been decimated now by development. M- m- multimillion dollars houses being built in, um, an enclave, a gated community so that there's no access for the fishermen and people who go down there swimming, [00:54:00] um, to get to the waterside because there is a...

It's kept secret, but surfers come to that point of the island because it has an amazing area for surfing at certain times of the year. The surfers come, they use it, and they go, but the developers have actually put up guard posts, put up 10-foot high fences, and you can no longer access that part of the island.

So we understand how to look after the island, we understand how to use it without using it up, so to speak, and we understand that we get the best out of it

if we share, share it and work with it. Um, there's, that's the way forward for everybody. Not, not just for Barbuda, but for everybody, because the world is getting smaller, and eventually there'll be nothing left.

So if you work with what you have, [00:55:00] especially nature, then y- you'll be fine.

Line Algoed: Thank you, Jackie. That's really powerful. Thank you. Mario,

Mario Núñez: Look, here from Caño Martín Peña — as I mentioned, the eight communities of Caño Martín Peña are bordered by a very important body of water, a canal that connects the Bay of San Juan to the sea, and on the eastern side to the Torresilla Lagoon, which is open sea in Piñones. So we are not exempt from the effects of climate change. We recognized the rise in sea level long before it was being talked about — already, simply because of the poor infrastructure these communities had.

Residents of Caño Martín Peña were already living with the effects of flooding, the loss of their belongings, and the deterioration of their properties. So with the acceleration of climate change and the rise in sea level, we remain vulnerable and exposed — regardless of whether the Caño Martín Peña can be dredged and channeled. That doesn't mean the communities will be free from flooding problems.

What matters most in all that planning around how we address climate change — first and foremost, in my understanding and recommendation — is recognizing the knowledge of residents. They are the ones living the effects and the damage day to day, every single day. And it is from that knowledge — the knowledge of the ordinary citizen, of the resident — that we must draw solutions and alternatives, because they are the ones who know in their daily lives how to confront those effects.

The importance of preserving natural resources. Jackie was talking about mangroves and how that entire coastal zone protected them — well, the same is true in the caño. The mangroves — we have four types of mangroves — are extremely important for preventing that rise in sea level from entering the communities with greater force. They also tend to purify, in a way, the water that comes in, and help manage that situation.

But I think that having a structure like the land trust with collective tenure also takes some of the burden off the individual resident and places it in an institution that becomes an ally and a collaborator for ordinary citizens in finding solutions and addressing the situations that affect us every day.

In our particular case — those who have visited us, like Leilani Farha, like Line, know that our caño was completely occupied by families and homes along the body of water. We have had to enter into a process of acquisition and resettlement and relocation of those families. Having the land trust model gives us the capacity to provide affordable housing for those most disadvantaged and vulnerable populations — because they too, in some way, even though we recognized the importance of recovering and restoring the waterway, it was not the residents who pushed for that policy. It was the state.

What we did was insert ourselves into those participatory processes and demand that participation from the state and the government — so that whatever was going to be done would be consistent with the natural resources, with the environment, in a harmonious relationship with the body of water, and would not end up harming the families.

As I said at the beginning, we know that the United States government — under whose colonial system we live — does not recognize the greenhouse effect, does not recognize the effects of climate change, is not aware of it. After Hurricane María, President Donald Trump came here to Puerto Rico, and what he did was throw rolls of paper towels — as if that were the immediate need of Puerto Rico's population, when they didn't even have food, when they didn't even have water. A lack of respect that somehow many governments in power endorse — but the rest of the people do not.

And that is the contradiction we're talking about: the ordinary citizen who, if organized, has power — but if not organized, the power will belong to the state and the governing institutions, in opposition to the needs of citizens. So it is vital to have a solid, strong, participatory community organization — not a rubber stamp, but one that is the leading voice, that makes decisions in the best interest of its communities and its fellow citizens and neighbors in the communities that make up the district.

Line Algoed: Excellent. Muchísimas gracias, Mario. Um, I think we can move on to the, uh, discussion [01:00:00] with the audience now. Um, I think there may be, uh, some questions. I know that Liz asked a question in the, uh, in the Q&A box, um, um, which maybe, uh, we can start with. Shall we do that? Great. So, um, um, Jackie, this question is for you from Liz Alden Wily, um, a, um, well-respected communal land tenure expert, um, who I also know very well.

Liz, nice to see you. Um, Jackie, how is the community post-election now actively demanding community land title over the island? Can you say something about that? Is there a plan in hand- Um- ... for such a campaign? I'm happy that court cases, Liz says, are going well, if slowly, but popular organization seems key.

What help can outside organizations and persons long working on communal land titles help?

Jackie Frank: Um, [01:01:00] since... Hi, Liz. Thank you for the question. Since the election, there has been a, an increased focus on the lands of Barbuda. So obviously Barbudans are concerned, oh, that the government are going to come and be bullies and take the land.

Um, but what we're doing as, as a, the council, the governing body and the Barbudans, is we are continuing to survey the land and issue, um, a right-to-occupy certificates when once a piece of land has been identified for a member

of the community. And have to keep in mind that the community are actually identif- and, uh, um, permitted to have three individual pieces, but for different purposes.

So one can be to build your house on. One can be for a business venture that you have, whether it's raising sheep, an orchard, or, um, Airbnb. [01:02:00] And then one can be for agriculture and, and farming. So there are different reasons to have the land, so we're continuing with that. But we've also found that there's been an increase, um, and I think it's, uh, a, a worry and frustration f- from Barbudans who are abroad wanting to, um, have their certificates as well.

So we're trying to get the balance right in terms of meeting everybody's need. But we also have to be aware that the council itself is responsible, to a certain extent, to the people that live on the island, so we have to designate certain areas of land to be where we will put housing and where we will put the farms and where we will, um, enable businesses, maybe noisy businesses like bars and things like that.

So maybe more zoning [01:03:00] And we- so that is a challenge, but we've also found that, found that we can get support for these challenges, um, with other organizations that are in a similar situation to us. So there is one, uh, there's one organization within the Caribbeans called the Stronger Caribbean Together, and that's different islands that amazingly are going through exactly the same challenges that we are with the government.

Um, the only difference being our land, um, our land situation where the land is communal. But at the same time, different governments are working with different companies or, um, other countries like the Chinese. They're all over, and they w- they seem to offer, offer you things, offer help with housing and help with other things in terms of a grant so you don't on the s- surface look like you [01:04:00] have to pay them back.

But I don't believe you get something for nothing. There will be some deal or something going on somewhere. So we find that working together we can compare notes with other islands and find problems but also find solutions. And we also find that working with international organizations, um, especially the legal ones, have, are very, uh, very helpful and, and we have also tr- worked with the United Nations to an extent as well.

And so the international legal People do have a challenge because again, for them funding can be an issue. But we, um, personally we've found them very, very helpful in the court cases that we have because they have the expertise that

we need to help us to fight and in some cases to win as well. So when, when [01:05:00] we, we challenged the airport that was being built on Barbuda, when it was Hurricane Irma, it was awful and everybody was scared, and we were told that a second hurricane coming, was coming, Hurricane Louise.

Louise never appeared, but they still took us off of the island and we were held in Antigua. They said it was a state of emergency, but it wasn't. We were held in Antigua whilst developers were allowed to come on the island, and event- ultimately built an airport while we started to build an airport, and they completed it and opened it last year.

And, um, we a- we are, two of us are challenging that, and it's through the help of international bodies and the legal team that has enabled to, enabled us to make that challenge, and it's been about eight years and I think we're going to get a final judgment on Thursday. So hope, fingers crossed, um, things will go [01:06:00] in our favor.

But the, the local support and the international support are very, very important in terms of giving hope and actually being able to make substantial challenges to what's being done to you and your island

Amber Khan: Thank you so much, Shaki. Um, we have one more question in the Q&A. Um, I love this question. It's about youth engagement, um, in this movement. It's from Genevieve Drouin. And Genevieve says, "Thank you so much for your words of knowledge. I wanted to know if there are any youth bodies that engage with these works.

If not, how can we encourage more interest within the younger generation? Uh, joy, gold, good luck, Rooftops Canada summer student researcher."

Mario Núñez:

In the case of Caño Martín Peña — the group of eight communities is the community-based entity that brings together the twelve organizations that make it up.

One of those twelve organizations is the group of young leaders in action. They are known as LIJAT. They are that intragenerational relay — and we now use the word "intra" because they are already inserted as young people participating in decision-making processes. Today, some of these young people serve on community boards, which are for the most part still led by adults — and we recognize that there is a culture of adultocracy, where adults make the decisions and children don't participate.

In the case of Caño Martín Peña, as one of our mottos says: "Our children have voice and vote" — because we are planning for the future, and that future we will not necessarily live to see. They are the ones who will live it. So it is extremely important for community organization to bring them into that participation early in the process, so that they develop a sense of belonging and see themselves reflected in the different initiatives and projects that are created by and for the community.

For us, the child, the young person, has just as much importance and value as the adult. We obviously recognize the experience and contributions of adults. But when you design and when you plan for the future, you have to count on the people who are going to inherit it — who are going to give continuity to that process. That is why we speak of an intragenerational transition or relay: so that we don't have to wait for someone to reach adulthood before they can participate and make decisions.

Jackie Frank: I, um, in Barbuda it's slightly different because the young people grow up understanding that the island belongs to them. Um, and as much as that sounds weighty, they know that it belongs to them. So when they hear [01:09:00] about members of their family who've traveled abroad and have to pay for the land, and then pay for the house on t- top of that, they understand.

So what, what they do is once they know they have a piece of land, they... We don't take loans from banks. We will save for so many months, and then you build the foundation. Save for a bit more, then you take the walls up to the ring beam. Save for a bit more, then you put the roof on. So it's a very, very gradual, and it all belongs to you, and there's no debt, um, around your neck afterwards.

'Cause if I was still in the UK, I'm 65 this year, and I would only just now be coming to the end of paying my mortgage off. Whereas the youngsters here, it amazes me how many people, um, own the land and the h- the, the house, and they're not yet 40, or they're only just 40. And they have one, maybe two properties, and they, they make funds and money from renting them.

[01:10:00] Um, so the young people here are aware. In terms of, um, youth organizations, if we find out or when we find out about them, it's, again, it's through the support mechanisms on the other islands that we link with in terms of helping us with our struggles, and we help them as best we can with struggles as, uh, with their struggles as well.

So information is shared. I've, I've been to, um, civil society, other civil society organizations where they talk about what their youth do or what they do with their youth, and that provides some level of inspiration in terms of what we can do. And what's really important is information-sharing so that people, the community have access to the information that we have, and then they also have access to us as counselors and/or activists.

So communication is import, uh, important. And Barbuda is still a very [01:11:00] oral society in an African kind of way. Um, and we're learning to become a more, more of a society where you record, writ- write things down because ultimately that's what's been important in the court cases that we've had, is, um, w- what you say being recorded and, and then it being used for or against you in court

Amber Khan: Thank you, Jackie. Um. Oh, Mario, go ahead.

Mario Núñez:

If you'll allow me to respond briefly to what my colleague Jackie Frank shared — it's also important to recognize that the Caño Martín Peña communities were spontaneous settlements that formed at the beginning of the last century, driven by migration from the countryside to the city, in an economic context of transition from an agricultural to an industrialized economy. People left their land in the countryside, in the interior of the island, to seek a better future for their families.

And arriving here, finding the demand and the need for housing that has always existed in this country — and is still part of our reality today — they settled along those margins. Many of these communities were built through self-effort and mutual aid, through the solidarity of residents working together. Those who could build in wood built in wood. Those who could build in concrete built in concrete. And that process of formation happened, just as it did there, through this mechanism of mutual help and the residents' and families' own effort.

And today, thank God, many of those families do not carry a mortgage note, do not have debt with the state or with a bank — because really, as my colleague Jackie was saying, it was the same here in Caño Martín Peña. My parents bought a small wooden house. Today it's a small concrete house — but as the family's economic situation improved, they added a room, put up a block wall, built a little concrete roof over half the house, and little by little that process unfolded.

So it is extremely important that residents also know the history of how these communities came to be. That is why we place so much emphasis in community organizing on recognizing historical context — because that connects people to, and makes them relevant to, the geographic setting where they are located and where they live.

Amber Khan: Thank you, Mario. Um, yeah, really important. Um, you know, we see this overlap between both places with, uh, this idea of debt when Jackie was talking [01:14:00] about how youth are owning homes and don't have that debt hanging over their head. Um, I feel like that's such another important aspect of this financialization.

Um, Leilani had a question for both Mario and Jackie around the use of law and litigation. Um, how important is that in your cases? Um, are you fearful that

legal initiatives maybe don't go in your favor and make things worse, or have they been really helpful for, um, your particular movement?

Jackie Frank: Um, we've... I found working with the legal representation that we have access to very helpful. It doesn't stop you being anxious. Um, there's still a level of anxiety there, but the mindset that I've adopt- adopted is, if I don't fight, then what? The, I [01:15:00] could be put off. So you have to make your mind up that no matter what, you're going to fight.

Take the airport case, for instance. They started the airport when we were not on island. We were being held in Antigua. We couldn't come home. Then when they did stop the, um, let, did let us come home, you could only come for four hours. You had to go to the boat, give your name. You were allowed on the boat.

You came over, you got four hours. You had to pass a, um, somebody, uh, on the boat who had a gun, a soldier. Said, "What's that for?" They said, "To come and get you if you don't come back off the island and go back to Antigua." You think, "But Antigua's not home. We want to stay here and be able to tidy our houses, put out the things that are damaged, and start clearing up."

So- You have to be prepared to do what's necessary w- within the law, and it really helps if you're able to find [01:16:00] someone who's willing to fight for you, pro bono preferably . Pro bono preferably. But, and they understand. So our legal team, the, the person we spoke to initially, he does understand 'cause he is of Caribbean descent, but even though he works in London.

So he has a, a good level of understanding, and he's helped us with other issues as well, and we, we were so prepared to fight that we went all the way to the Privy Council in England, 'cause they kept knocking us back and saying that we had no, no real interest. We were just being busybodies. Um, there was no real interest in fighting.

Th- that's what they tried to say. So we ended up at the, um, the Privy Council in England, and we won, and that really lifted the island's spirit. Sometimes you might think that the people are, um, very quiet and they're not cons- but they are listening. They are wanting to know what's going on. [01:17:00] And this mo- most recently, this is the...

People have come up to me in the street and said, "Thank you. Thank you for fighting for us." It, it's worth doing because it's important, not just to me, but to the other Barbudans too, and Barbudans here on Ireland and/or those away in

the diaspora. Um, and we were fortunate enough to find a legal team who had good links, and, um, they regularly took on challenges where people were be- being downtrodden by either governments or big corporations or just people with money who think that they can come and do what they want on the island with the government say so.

So fighting, fighting, fighting is important and, and trying to be as well-informed as you can as well. So, yes[01:18:00]

Mario Núñez: Just to respond briefly to Leilani's question. Here in Caño Martín Peña, we recognize the importance of allies and collaborators. And many of those allies and collaborators come from our universities — especially the law schools, both the public one, the University of Puerto Rico, and the School of Law at the Inter-American University of Puerto Rico.

When the Caño Martín Peña communities suffered the setback of having their lands taken in 2009, we set about identifying a number of lawyers — professors at those law schools — including licenciado Michelle Godreau, Erika Fontanes, María Hernández, and Luis Rafael Rivera, who in some way were giving us guidance, directing us.

And I say "directing us" because at that moment, from my role as community leader — I was president of the G8 at the time — they were pointing us toward what alternatives we had to fight back against what had been done to us, against the policies the state had established to strip the land trust of its lands.

And in that direction — it is extremely valuable, extremely important, to always have access to that expertise and knowledge of specialists, because the vast majority of our residents are not lawyers, not engineers, not planners. So that is why it matters to have these resources that guide and direct you — but that do not make the decisions.

It's important to recognize expertise and knowledge. The decisions are made by the citizens, by the residents who live in Caño Martín Peña — because in the end, they are the ones who remain. The others are passing through the process, helping and collaborating. So we have always said: professionals and technicians are valuable and we recognize and welcome them — but they are there to direct and guide, not to make decisions.

Line Algoed: Um,

I want to repeat to the audience that if there is any questions, please do let us know in the Q&A. Also, uh, questions for Mario, for Jackie, but also for Leilani. So, uh, please do let us know. Um, but, um, in the meantime, I wanted to ask, uh, Leilani a quick question, and that's, um, really because we're living in a world of crisis, and one of the crises I feel is happening at the UN.

And, like, how the role of the UN ... Like, we're seeing so many terrible things, and we do hear voices from the UN, but hardly ev- anybody listens or a lot is

going on. So would you mind sharing, [01:21:00] um, as to your point of, like, the importance of connection, the importance of global solidarity, the importance of, like, you know what, there, there still is a role, um, for the UN, I feel, if I see people like you who have been the Special Rapporteur, but of course, also Francesca Aldanese and the work that she's doing right now inside the UN.

Um, so can you maybe speak a little bit about your time as Special Rapporteur and how you felt that the UN could help us in this global struggle?

Leilani Farha: W- yes, though of course I have changed immensely since I was UN Special Rapporteur because the world, uh, opened itself to me in ways that, uh, even I didn't fully understand. Um, after October 7th, 2023, uh, for me, everything changed. Um, I am of Arab descent as well, so I'm from southern Lebanon. My family is from the south there, [01:22:00] and so obviously deeply affected by the politics of the day.

Um, and so I mean, I would, I would comment on Francesca Albanese, who is a, a force unto herself, um, that the biggest impact she has had has been outside of the UN, not within the UN. That's my feeling. Um, I think she's helped to create a worldwide, uh, pro-Palestine anti-genocide movement, uh, and very successfully so.

Um, but I don't think that she has been particularly effective, not having anything to do with her, but having to do with world politics at changing governments', uh, actions, uh, governments themselves. Um, I do think she has empowered many, many people worldwide to take action, um, not just the, you know, Sumud flotillas, but also all of these labor actions.

And you see in Italy, l- [01:23:00] the labor unions really using their ability to close a port or to deny entry of goods or export of goods using those powers. So, uh, she has used the role of UN Special Rapporteur particularly effectively in that regard. I would like to think that I did the same thing, although on a much smaller scale.

Um, we, we didn't, do not have a worldwide global movement for the right to housing, not yet. I did try as hard as I could to, um, invigorate the right to housing, and I think I was successful in that way. I think, um, the post of UN Special Rapporteur enables you to travel the world, to start making those connections that we've all been talking about, and, and to give a feel of the global nature of the crisis and the requirement of a global response.

And we have now in place, uh, Caldo, who is the new UN Special Rapporteur, and I, I [01:24:00] think his aim is to keep the energy and, and to try to unite movements. Um, he's having some, in the next Oh, I, is it this week maybe and next week? I'm not sure. You can go to the website and find out, but he's hosting some CSO, um, rou- online roundtables, um, where people can meet with him and ex- and discuss and, and express what are the main housing, uh, and land issues, uh, that communities are facing, um, and why they might constitute rights violations and, and should be of concern to him.

I just want to make one comment. Um, I think the UN system is broken. I don't think I'm the, the first or the last to say that. Um, particularly the pol- the political. So the UN system has, uh, two tranches. One is a political tranche, so that's where you see the Security Council, non-functioning Security Council [01:25:00] with all these vetoes, the General Assembly, also the political branch.

But it does have the independent mechanisms that are not political, and I still see value and im- importance there. Um, the special rapporteurs fall under this non-political branch or tranche. Um, there are UN committees that review whether governments are meeting their human rights obligations. I still believe in those mechanisms.

Um, there's a committee that really reviews the right to housing itself, uh, called the Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. Every country is reviewed every, it's supposed to be every five years. It's longer than that. And most importantly, and I'll end here, you know, I've been, of course, um Really seized with this issue of the value of human rights.

What is the value of human rights? [01:26:00] And, and for the last three years, really two and a half years, I've questioned the value every day. Uh, but I feel that it is, um, kind of inappropriate for me to give up on human rights when I, I live in more than adequate housing. I have ... Like, my housing is more than adequate.

I'm very lucky. I have socioeconomic privilege. Uh, I live ... By luck of birth, I live in a relatively peaceful country, et cetera. It is inappropriate for me to give up on human rights when people who are struggling, Jackie, Mario, their communities, have not given up on their entitlements to land and property and housing.

How can ... Who am I to give up when the people themselves are not giving up? And, and I see rights claiming in the smallest of places. I mean, here in my own

[01:27:00] country, when people pitch a tent in a park because they're homeless, they are claiming their right to exist, to dwell, to live. Hello. They're like, "Hello, I'm here.

I'm not going anywhere." That's ... Jackie and Mario spoke so eloquently about this. People are not going anywhere. They are tied to their homes. Those are rights claims. So I'm not giving up on human rights be- until the people give up on human rights, and they're not. So we'll just keep, as Jackie said, we'll just keep fighting, fighting, fighting.

Thank you.

Amber Khan: Thank

you so much, Leilani. Um, what a great note to end on. Thank you so much, um, Leilani, for grounding us in this current moment. Um, as you said, this coordinated ecosystem of political and corporate extraction that we're facing globally, um, but that's specifically impacting Brown and Black people, Indigenous people, the poor the most.

Um, thank you, Line, for sharing what really deep community-engaged research looks [01:28:00] like through this work, um, and for all of your time and effort writing this important piece for all of us to learn from. And Jackie and Mario, for the work that you do every day on the ground, um, fighting against land grabs.

It's really an essential example, um, of local resistance that everyday people are taking. Um, and of course, to the International Center for Community Land Trusts for bringing us together in this really critical moment so we can connect, um, at the risk of sounding cheesy, to dream about a better world, um, and share lessons learned.

And so I hope everyone is leaving the conversation feeling empowered, um, and informed about some of the important resistance work that's happening across the world against land grabbing. And some next steps, Pierre's dropped, um, tons of links into the chat. Um, you can go to Terra Nostra Press to read Line's book, Our Land, Our Survival.

You can email Ben, um, ben@communitylandtrust.net if you'd like to join the CLT Center's work group for CLTs and informal settlements. [01:29:00] Uh, of course, supporting the Barbudan land defenders taking on big developers exploiting their homelands by donating to the Global Legal Action Network

campaign. Um, and then supporting and sharing about Caño Martín Peña CLT and the amazing work that they're doing in Puerto Rico.

And then lastly, there will be, um, a quick pop-up exit survey to get your feedback on the webinar, um, which is very welcome so we can improve these webinars for you all. Um, thank you all. I hope you have a great day and rest of your evening, wherever you're calling in from[01:30:00]

Mario Núñez: Amber, give me just one minute — excuse me — I want to close with some good news. From Puerto Rico, here at the Fideicomiso de la Tierra del Caño Martín Peña, together with Enjambre Colectivo, we are building networks of land trusts — both at the local and international level. Right now, locally, we have five land trusts in Puerto Rico that were born from the Caño Martín Peña model, each with their own different approaches and particularities. And we have other communities and other models of collective tenure in process as well — including cooperative housing, with two cooperatives currently forming and participating in this land trust network.

And at the broader international level, in Latin America, we are working with Asunción, Paraguay; Concepción de Ataco, El Salvador; and we are now also in conversations with the Chocó Andino in Ecuador. So these are efforts where we replicate and share experiences so that they can serve as reference points for other communities to take on the work of exploring different models.

Amber Khan: Perfect. Thank you, Mario. I'm excited to learn more about that network. Okay, great. Well, have a good day everyone, and thank you so much for joining us. [01:31:00] Thank you everyone. And thanks Amber for your excellent- Gracias ... convening