



FREEDOM
FIGHTERS
PORTRAITS



RIGOBERTA MENCHÚ

Leader for the **right to self-determination for indian people in Guatemala**



BEGINNINGS OF A COMMITMENT

Rigoberta Menchú was born in 1959 in the **Guatemalan highlands**, into the **Quiché Maya**, an **indigenous people** of Central America. Indigenous communities there are victims of segregation and deep social inequalities.

Born into a very poor family, **she began working at the age of five** on the '*fincas*' along the Pacific coast, **large agricultural estates owned by wealthy landowners**. Her younger brother died as a result of the very harsh working conditions. As a teenager, she moved to Guatemala City, where she worked as a domestic worker and **experienced anti-indigenous racism**.



A HUNTED ACTIVIST

Her commitment followed that of her family in **activist struggles for the Indigenous peoples' right to ownership of their ancestral lands.**

She then joined the Peasant Unity Committee (C.U.C.), an **organization of rural communities formed to defend villages** against oppression by the military and large landowners.

Considered "**subversive**," the activist was hunted by the authorities. This repression targeted villages and peasant movements accused of supporting the guerrilla forces.



EXILE IN MEXICO

The activists' commitment against repression led to **tragic consequences**. Her parents and one of her brothers were **tortured and executed by the military regime**.

In 1981, she was **forced into exile** in Mexico, where she continued her **peaceful struggle** alongside networks of exiles to denounce the crimes of the dictatorship in their country.

She became involved in the **feminist movement**, highlighting the situation of women in Latin America. She took part in the writing of the book ***I, Rigoberta Menchú***. The struggle for the rights of Indigenous peoples gained international recognition.



THE RETURN OF AN ICON

She returned to Guatemala and continued her struggle for the self-determination of Indigenous peoples. In 1992, the **Nobel Peace Prize** recognized her long-standing fight on behalf of her people. She also became a UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador.

After the civil war, she sought to **bring former military leaders to justice** for genocide against the Maya people. With the *Winaq* movement, a **platform bringing together Maya organizations across the country**, she ran for president. Her foundation continues the struggle for the rights of Indigenous peoples.



*"Peace cannot exist without justice, justice cannot exist without fairness, fairness cannot exist without development, development cannot exist without democracy, **democracy cannot exist without respect for the identity and worth of cultures and peoples.**"*

Rigoberta Menchú

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