El Salvador - Lencas

Profile

The Lencas reside in the Eastern departments of Usulután, San Miguel, Morazán and La Unión north and east of the Lempa river. Few Lencas still speak the language ‘Potón Lenca’, however a few Potón Lenca texts have been published aimed at promoting and protecting the language and culture.

Historical Context

The Lencas ruled sizeable areas of what is now Honduras and El Salvador.

In their efforts to control the region, the Spanish invaded the Lenca Kingdom in the 16th century. Under Crown Princess Antu Silan Ulap I, the Lencas organized a war of resistance conducted by combatants drawn from all Lenca cities, including the eastern region of present-day El Salvador. These warriors were later put under the command of a war chief named Lempira who led a ten-year resistance struggle that ended with his assassination. In 1536, the Spanish called for peace talks apparently with ulterior motives; upon his arrival, Lempira was shot by the Spanish.

The Lencas in El Salvador have maintained the memory of the ancient dynasty through oral tradition and have instituted programs with universities and community councils to preserve and promote their heritage, history, health and human rights.

Current Issues

Very few of the current Lenca population speak the native language. Despite government efforts to revitalize the Pipil language through intercultural education, this programme has yet to be extended to other indigenous communities. While the Pipil language has been revived, other languages – such as Poton Lenca spoken by the Lencas, have not received this kind of support.