



END THE GENOCIDE OF THE YANOMAMI PEOPLE!

The Brazilian government must remove miners from the Yanomami indigenous territory and implement an Emergency Intersectoral Plan for Health Care and Territorial Control

The World Federation of Public Health Associations (WFPHA), the Brazilian Association of Collective Health (Abrasco) and the Brazilian Association of Anthropology (ABA) denounce the Brazilian Federal Government's ommissive and conniving attitude towards the alarming situation experienced by the Yanomami and Ye'kwana peoples in the Yanomami Indigenous Territory (TIY), located on the Brazilian-Venezuela border.

Once again, the gold mining industry has invaded their traditional territory: more than twenty thousand miners are occupying and degrading their lands, forests, waterways, food sources, health, and community life in recent years.

Not even the risk of Covid-19 reaching local Yanomami groups, which could cause countless deaths, sensitized the Federal Government to protect these peoples and prevent mining, the main source of disease transmission, from the indigenous territory.

The impacts of "development" projects and invasions on the Yanomami people's health and lives have been recorded for many decades. In the 1970s, during the Perimetral Norte/BR-210 highway construction, infectious diseases killed between 22% and 50% of the village populations directly and indirectly impacted by their implementation (1). Between 1987 and 1990, the invasion of miners in Yanomami territory generated epidemics of malaria and other diseases, which caused the death of at least 15% of the indigenous population. The situation did not become more severe because pressured by different authorities, the federal government initiated the removal of the miners and implemented an emergency plan for Yanomami health care (2, 3, 4).

After almost two decades of control and monitoring policies for the Yanomami Indigenous Territory, the decrease in investment for monitoring and the deactivation of the Funai Protection Bases in the Yanomami Indigenous Territory at the end of

the 2000s created the conditions for the gold mining activity to advance again in different parts of the indigenous land. In recent years, Yanomami and Ye'kwana leaders and their representative organizations, such as the Hutukara Yanomami Association and the Wanasseduume Ye'kwana Association, have reiterated several reports of invasions by miners.

A study carried out in the Yanomami Indigenous Territory in 2014 looked at the villages of the Paapiú and Waikás region evaluated the exposure of indigenous peoples to mercury (Hg) from gold mining activities, and high levels of contamination were found, especially among children and women of reproductive age. At the time, the number of miners in the Yanomami Indigenous Territory was 5,000. Today, estimates are that this number is almost five times greater, and the area occupied and degraded by gold mining and mercury contamination has expanded (5, 6).

The document released in November 2020 by the Yanomami and Ye'kwana Leadership Forum (7) and the Pro-Yanomami and Ye'kwana Network (8) emphasize the damage of the current Brazilian government: there has been an exponential growth of illegal mining and deforestation in the Yanomami Indigenous Territory. In addition, there has been a significant increase in malaria cases, which combined with Covid-19 profoundly worsened the health situation in the Yanomami Indigenous Territory. Covid-19 has been spread by miners in the three most environmentally degraded areas, Waikás, Kayanau, and Aracaçá (9, 10).

Between 2019 and 2021, the dismantling of primary health care for the indigenous population in the country affected the operational capacity of the Yanomami Special Indigenous Health District (DSEI-Y), responsible for health care in their territory.

When Covid-19 entered in Indigenous Territories, immediately, the Articulation of the Indigenous Peoples of Brazil (APIB) in the Federal Supreme Court (STF) wrote the Action of Noncompliance with the Fundamental Precept (ADPF) No. 709 that resulted in condemned the omission of the Federal Government.

The surveys and analyses conducted by the Abrasco Indigenous Health Working Group in support of APIB were presented in May 2020 in the context of ADPF No. 709. These analyses evidenced the social and health tragedy among the Yanomami Indigenous Territory as a consequence of the intentional inaction of

the federal agencies to prevent and punish the mining activity and the people responsible for it

The death of two Yanomami children last November and the context of conflict generated by the mining presence in the Yanomami Indigenous Territory gained repercussion in the national and international media (11). The Federal Supreme Court ordered the Union to report within five days about the nutritional situation of the Yanomami population: as their access to drinking water, health services provided, and the implementation of measures from the General Plan for Fighting Covid-19, under ADPF 709. The response from the Attorney General of the Union (AGU) was evasive. It practically takes off the Special Department for Indigenous Health (SESAI) of its responsibility and transfers the visible inoperability of the population's primary health care measures to the Yanomami. Budgetary and the number of contracts and services provided by the Federal Government do not allow for a consistent analysis of planning and implementing actions to impact the Yanomami people's health (12).

In this context, the WFPHA, Abrasco, and ABA urge the global community to support the urgent appeal of the indigenous peoples regarding the gravity of the health situation and the urgency of measures to protect life and health of the Yanomami and Ye'kwana peoples. It is clear that the invaders are among the main culprits of this calamity and must be urgently removed.

In addition, it is essential to articulate a consistent Emergency Intersectoral Plan for Health Care and Territorial Control, with inter-institutional participation, involving indigenous organizations, federal, state and local governments, judicial bodies, and academic institutions.

References

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5. Bastos, Paulo C. & Hacon, Sandra de S. (Coords.) Avaliação da exposição ambiental ao mercúrio proveniente de atividade garimpeira de ouro na Terra Indígena Yanomami, Roraima, Amazônia, Brasil. Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Fundação Oswaldo Cruz (Fiocruz), Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro (PUC-RJ); São Paulo, SP: Instituto Socioambiental (ISA); Boa Vista: Hutukara Associação Yanomami (HAY), 2016.
6. Elevados níveis de contaminação por mercúrio preocupam comunidade indígena Yanomami. Informe ENSP, publicado em 08/04/2016. Available in: <http://informe.ensp.fiocruz.br/noticias/39388>
7. The Yanomami and Ye'kwana Leadership Forum is the main decision-making body of the Yanomami Indigenous Territory. It was established in mid 2019 and is formed by the Hutukara Yanomami Association (HAY), Wanasseduume Ye'kwana Association (SEDUUME), Yanomami Kumirayoma Women's Association (AMYK), Texoli Ninam Association of the State of Roraima (TANER), Rio Yanomami Association Cauaburis and Affluents (AYRCA), Kurikama Yanomami Association (AKY) and Hwenama Association of Yanomami Peoples of Roraima (HAPYR).
8. The Pro-Yanomami and Ye'kwana Network was created in April 2020, it is formed by more than 50 researchers and supporters of the Yanomami and Ye'kwana peoples, including anthropologists, linguists, doctors, indigenists, lawyers and artists in direct dialogue with the indigenous people and their associations.
9. Machado, Ana Maria et. al (orgs.). Xawara: rastros da Covid-19 na Terra Indígena Yanomami e a omissão do Estado. São Paulo, SP: Instituto Socioambiental, 2020. Available in: <https://acervo.socioambiental.org/acervo/publicacoes-isa/xawara-rastros-da-covid-19-na-terra-indigena-yanomami-e-omissao-do-estado>
10. Official figures show that by 12/02/2021 2,123 cases of covid-19 had been confirmed among the indigenous population served by the DSEI-Y and a total of 22 deaths. By modeling the vulnerability of indigenous peoples in Brazil, covid-19, jointly developed by the Center for Remote Sensing of the Federal University of Minas Gerais (CSR/UFMG) and the Instituto Socioambiental (ISA), TIY is the second Indigenous Land with the highest rate of vulnerability. Available in: https://covid19.socioambiental.org/?gclid=Cj0KCQiA-qGNBhD3ARIsAO_o7vLUK-bzT9rjR2tr3_7ODc1_Lxhci6egg_4VOX7hViSoDz83NS17HAUaAvw7EALw_wcB
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12. AGU - Advocacia Geral da União. Arguição por Descumprimento de Preceito Fundamental 709. Brasília, 22 de novembro de 2021.