

July 29, 2019

### **Statement Regarding Recent Invasions of Indigenous Lands in Brazil by Mining Interests**

The Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America (SALSA), an international organization of academic experts on the peoples and environments of the region, strongly condemns the recent invasion of native lands in Brazil by several thousand illegal gold-miners, and we call upon the Brazilian government and international human rights community to manifest themselves with solutions appropriate to the crimes taking place on Yanomami lands in the state of Roraima, on Wajãpi lands in the state of Amapá, and indeed throughout the country.

In recent days, alarming reports have verified that as many as 20,000 miners have entered Yanomami homelands near the border between Brazil and Venezuela, principally in the Terra Indígena Yanomami. According to their leaders, this invasion threatens the very existence of the Yanomami people, as mining activities result in deforestation, the poisoning of waterways with mercury and other toxic chemicals, and the introduction of fatal diseases such as measles and malaria. A similarly tragic situation has also developed in the Terra Indígena Wajãpi (near the border with French Guiana), where on July 22 Cacique Emyra Wajãpi was murdered by non-indigenous gold miners who had invaded the territory. In the wake of this homicide, Wajãpi relatives spent days trying to raise the alarm with the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI) and the Federal Police, time when the Wajãpi people remained in danger of repeated attacks.

The miners currently trespassing on native lands are encouraged by Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro's open hostility towards the constitutionally-protected rights of indigenous peoples, which include the right to demarcated and protected homelands. Just as concerning, the president has recently signaled his support for a law that would open up all Brazil's indigenous territories to commercial mining interests (roughly 13% of the total area of the country). Illegal mining operations such as the ones underway on Yanomami and Wajãpi lands are present in dozens of other indigenous territories (including TI Apyterewa and TI Munduruku in Pará, TI Uru-eu-wau-wau in Rondônia, and TI Cachoeira Seca in Amapá). We fear that the proposed legislation will only further incentivize land invasions, environmental destruction, and violence, and will give these crimes the appearance of legality.

We join our voices to colleagues who are also alarmed by the current threats to indigenous Amazonians and the disposition of regional governments to encourage land grabbing and illegal mining operations (see the 22 July 2019 letter from the American Anthropological Association). We strongly urge the Brazilian government to ensure the integrity of Yanomami and Wajãpi lands, to attend to the health and safety needs of all indigenous peoples, and to immediately evict invaders from demarcated indigenous territories. We also call for the tabling of the proposed change to mining laws in Brazil, and hope that the government will pursue an open and inclusive dialogue with the nation's 254 indigenous groups regarding the integrity of their lands and the dignity of their communities.



Dr. Carlos D. Londoño Sulkin  
SALSA President



Dr. Jeremy M. Campbell  
Chair, Public Issues and Actions Committee