

July 22, 2019

International Secretariat  
Amnesty International  
Calle Luz Saviñon 519 Colonia del Valle  
Benito Juarez 03100  
Ciudad de Mexico

The American Anthropological Association is calling on the human rights community to immediately address the invasive threats facing the indigenous Yanomami people in the Amazon region. News reports estimate between 10,000 to 20,000 goldminers are now on Yanomami lands, spreading malaria in the region and polluting many of the rivers with mercury. The massive influx has had an especially devastating effect regarding the spread of measles.

The best figures available on the current measles epidemic among the Yanomami in Venezuela have come from the Washington, D.C.-based Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). In its [most recent update](#), from May 17 of this year, PAHO said that in 2018 there were 513 confirmed cases of measles and 62 deaths among the country's indigenous groups, including 150 cases in Amazonas and Bolívar. It noted that previous data from national authorities showed that in the first half of 2018 there were 126 confirmed cases, including 53 deaths, in Yanomami municipality, Amazonas, alone.

This invasion is an existential threat to many of their communities. Emboldened by Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro's support for land invaders, miners have already built a number of settlements and airstrips. The sanctuary the Yanomami inhabit is also threatened by a governmental decree. The Orinoco Mining Arc, a controversial initiative of the administration of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, has designated almost 112,000 square kilometers (42,250 square miles) for the exploitation of minerals and precious stones including gold and diamonds.

Our concern is founded on our scholarly knowledge of the impacts of such incursions on indigenous communities. Founded in 1902, the AAA is the world's largest professional anthropology organization, with 10,000 members in the United States and many nations across the globe, including Brazil. Our mission is to advance understanding through anthropological research, and to apply that understanding to tackling some of the world's most pressing problems.

It is no exaggeration to say that some of the world's indigenous peoples are facing annihilation, and recent history is not on their side. During the late 1980s, when some 40,000 goldminers moved onto their land, about a fifth of the indigenous population in the region died in just seven years due to violence, malaria, malnutrition, mercury poisoning and other causes. Effective action is sorely and urgently needed to stop this new surge.

We strongly urge an intervention on behalf of the Yanomami by persuading the governments of Brazil and Venezuela, through sanctions or other means, to cease their incendiary anti-indigenous language, and effectively respond to this blatant case of genocide, ethnocide, and ecocide. The Yanomami are an essential part of the world's diverse heritage, deserving human dignity and the protection of cognizant authorities. They help tell the story of all the peoples of the Amazon. To permit the diminishment or destruction of this invaluable community would be unconscionable.

Sincerely,



Dr. Alex Barker  
President, AAA



Dr. Edward Liebow  
Executive Director, AAA