

Indigenous Peoples Across the Amazon Issue Demands in Response to Coronavirus Pandemic

225 international organizations announce their solidarity with indigenous demands during the coronavirus pandemic, including an Amazon-wide moratorium on all industrial activity

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Oakland, CA – Hundreds of human rights, environmental, and social justice organizations around the world demanded in [an open statement \(news/2020/0408-statement-in-solidarity-with-amazonian-indigenous-peoples-facing-the-novel-coronavirus\)](https://www.amazonwatch.org/news/2020/0408-statement-in-solidarity-with-amazonian-indigenous-peoples-facing-the-novel-coronavirus) issued today that governments and other entities enact urgent policies to ensure that the COVID-19 virus does not result in massive deaths within indigenous communities. As the world observes the 50th anniversary of Earth Day this week, this effort underscores the central importance of

supporting indigenous forest defenders in mitigating climate change and preventing future pandemics and highlights the role that other non-state actors must play in not exacerbating an already-precarious situation.

The statement, which endorsing organizations are sending to governments, corporations, multilateral institutions, and religious organizations, supports crucial demands that indigenous organizations have made in recent weeks as the existential threat of COVID-19 bears down on their communities. These demands include: a moratorium on all industrial activities on or surrounding indigenous lands including mining, oil drilling, logging, and agribusiness operations; the barring of all religious proselytization; the affirmation of the right of indigenous peoples to self-determination and self-protection during the pandemic; adequate and culturally-appropriate public health services; rigorous law enforcement on organized crime threats in and around indigenous territories; and the creation of urgent action working groups to deal with the health, food, and security emergencies that have arisen during this pandemic.

According to the Pan-Amazon Ecclesial Network (REPAM), as of Monday, April 20th, there have been 7,349 cases of COVID-19 reported in the Pan Amazon region, resulting in 383 deaths. These numbers can be assumed to be below the actual number of cases and deaths.

The threats posed by COVID-19 to indigenous communities vary over the enormous expanse of the Amazon rainforest, and are compounded by ongoing invasions of indigenous territories and the targeting of indigenous leaders with violence and intimidation.

Industrial activities and organized criminal operations on or near indigenous territories remains a critical threat to indigenous peoples' security and human rights at this time, as well as the ecological integrity of indigenous lands. Yet several of the world's largest financial institutions continue to contribute billions to the continuation and expansion of these activities in the

Amazon, as detailed in two recently-published Amazon Watch reports [*Investing in Amazon Crude*](#) ([news/2020/0312-investing-in-amazon-crude](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/0312-investing-in-amazon-crude)), and [*Complicity in Destruction II*](#) ([news/2019/0425-complicity-in-destruction-2](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/0425-complicity-in-destruction-2)).

In Brazil, the Bolsonaro regime poses an [unprecedented existential threat to indigenous people](#) (<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/19/world/americas/bolsonaro-brazil-amazon-indigenous.html#click=https://t.co/22fRIZGHyT>). After dismantling constitutional protections for indigenous communities and slashing the budget of both Brazil's indigenous agency FUNAI and its environmental agency IBAMA, Bolsonaro [proposed a bill](#) (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/06/brazil-bolsonaro-commercial-mining-indigenous-land-bill>) to Congress that would effectively legalize industrial mining, oil and gas projects, and hydroelectric dams on indigenous lands. Encouraged by Bolsonaro's narrative and policy proposals, illegal loggers, miners, land grabbers and hunters are fanning out into the Brazilian Amazon's federally-protected forests, putting indigenous peoples and traditional communities in grave danger. According to the Hutukara Yanomami Association, [more than 25,000 illegal miners have invaded Yanomami territory](#) (<https://news.mongabay.com/2019/07/yanomami-amazon-reserve-invaded-by-20000-miners-bolsonaro-fails-to-act/>), where they are suspected of transmitting the coronavirus to a [15-year old Yanomami boy](#) (<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/amazon-yanomami-tribe-15-year-old-boy-dies-coronavirus-covid-19/>), who died of the disease.

Meanwhile, the fanatical religious wing of Bolsonaro's base is pushing to open the lands of indigenous people living in voluntary isolation to evangelical missionaries, whose proselytization could [potentially lead to genocide](#) (https://www.huffpostbrasil.com/entry/coronavirus-indigenous-amazon-missionaries-bolsonaro_n_5e9cf173c5b635d25d6ec824). With a record-breaking [eleven indigenous leaders murdered](#) (<https://www.cptnacional.org.br/component/jdownloads/send/73-other-languages->

[releases/14180-en-press-release-brazilian-rural-area-is-on-fire-cpt-communication-office](#)), in

Bolsonaro's first year in power, indigenous people now need to resist missionaries and a pandemic that could be more deadly to their communities than measles.

In Ecuador, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have exposed profound weakness in public health infrastructure, particularly for historically marginalized communities such as indigenous peoples, afro-descendants, and traditional peoples. There are 10,128 cases of COVID in Ecuador, with 1,333 deaths reported. The health emergency in the Ecuadorian Amazon has been compounded with the unprecedented flooding of indigenous communities and the recent rupture of two oil pipelines, which spilled crude into the Coca and Napo rivers and polluted the water sources of more than 90,000 people, including 2,000 indigenous families, further undermining water and food security of local communities already coping with the spread of the novel coronavirus.

In Peru, for the last several weeks, the country's premier Amazon indigenous umbrella federation, AIDSESEP, has been calling on the government of President Martin Vizcarra to implement a national strategy for attending to indigenous peoples, which has not been published to date. COVID-19 is advancing into indigenous territories, with initial cases of infections being documented in the Shipibo community of Nuevo Bethel in the central Amazon region. The precarious situation of threatened community leaders remains, with a Cacaitaibo indigenous leader having been killed on Sunday, April 12th, and a local judge having set his confessed killer free following an initial hearing. Meanwhile, some extractive industries continue to operate such as oil palm companies in the central Peruvian Amazon.

Without guidance from public health agencies, many indigenous groups are taking preventative measures on their own to stop the coronavirus from entering their communities: voluntary social distancing, use of proper hygiene practices, suspension of major protests, events, travel and even the closing of traffic between villages to prevent the disease's progression.

Sônia Guajajara, executive coordinator of the Association of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil –

APIB:

Gold mining is one of the main weapons that kills indigenous peoples. It's impossible to conceive of Bolsonaro's insane [proposal] to legalize commercial mining in indigenous lands, which is a predatory activity that will only increase diseases, invasions, prostitution and alcoholism, adding up to profound damage to the way of life of indigenous peoples and the total destruction of our forests. In times of pandemic, an effective policy for the removal of invaders is necessary. We say no to mining in our territories and we demand a moratorium to illegal activities inside our territories!

Nara Baré, coordinator of the Indigenous Organizations from the Brazilian Amazon – COIAB:

Since Jair Bolsonaro took office, our indigenous lands are increasingly threatened by predatory economic activities that threaten the integrity of our ancestral territories and the natural resources essential for our survival. With the COVID-19 crisis, the illegal activities of miners, loggers, missionaries, drug traffickers, and other invaders, pose an even greater threat, because they can bring the virus to our territories and communities. For this reason, we demand that any economic activity in our territories be stopped immediately, thus guaranteeing the protection of all our children, women, men, young people, wise elders, and our relatives in voluntary isolation.

Marlon Vargas, President of The Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon – CONFENIAE:

"As indigenous peoples of the Ecuadorian Amazon confronting the COVID crisis, we are fighting for our survival in the absence of government support for our vulnerable communities. We are fighting for food sovereignty and potable water, as well as access to basic sanitary supplies. Meanwhile our drinking water has been contaminated by the recent oil spill. If there was ever a moment for the world to heed our call to keep fossil fuels in the ground it is now – for indigenous rights, biodiversity, and climate change. Oil has been a curse for our peoples and our country. We are the guardians of the forest. Our traditional ways of forest management protect our world from climate chaos and global pandemics – we hope this is a global awakening for a post petroleum economy that respects rights and the need to keep forests standing, and oil in the ground."

Lizardo Cauper, President of the Inter-Ethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Amazon – AIDSESEP:

"Indigenous peoples are being discriminated against. Here we are at the bicentennial of the Peruvian state and we continue to be invisible, we are not included, and there isn't a health system to attend to indigenous peoples. This didn't start with COVID, the government has never attended our needs. 36 days have passed since the quarantine was declared and the government hasn't even approved any norms, any directive or other concrete measure. Everything is just promises. We demand a plan, with a budget, which can guarantee information, medicine and food for the more than 1800 indigenous communities of the Peruvian Amazon."

Kevin Koenig, Climate and Energy Director at Amazon Watch:

"Oil drilling is a primary threat to indigenous peoples in the Western Amazon, both in times of COVID and beyond. The recent collapse of oil prices is a death knell for the fossil fuel industry, and demonstrates what indigenous peoples and climate advocates have been saying for years: oil has been a curse for local economies, indigenous communities, biodiversity, the climate and, increasingly, on pocketbooks. As indigenous peoples struggle to survive through this pandemic, governments and companies must respect indigenous autonomy and keep the oil in the ground!"

Christian Poirier, Program Director at Amazon Watch:

"Our solidarity statement with Amazonian indigenous peoples comes as these communities face manifold threats, from a public health emergency to the encroachment of extractive industry and organized crime upon their lands. To contain this unfolding socio-environmental disaster, government, corporate, and multilateral decision makers must ensure that the demands of indigenous peoples are heeded, with the immediate cessation of all industrial activities on their lands, while upholding rigorous governance standards to contain criminal activities. To do less would be to invite ethnocide and environmental devastation."

Read the [Statement in Solidarity With Amazonian Indigenous Peoples Facing the Novel Coronavirus \(news/2020/0408-statement-in-solidarity-with-amazonian-indigenous-peoples-facing-the-novel-coronavirus\)](#).