

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 29, 2021

Ambassador Todd Chapman
U.S. Embassy
SES - Av. das Nações, Quadra 801, Lote 03
70403-900 - Brasília, DF
Brazil

Ambassador Chapman,

We write to you out of a deep concern for the protection of the Amazon rainforest and the Indigenous peoples who are its most effective guardians. Specifically, we are concerned for the safety and security of the Munduruku people, whose territory in the heart of the Brazilian Amazon is under long-standing and increasing threat of invasion, deforestation, and destruction.

On one hand, we are concerned for the individual safety of numerous Munduruku leaders associated with representative organizations such as the Munduruku Ipereg Ayu Movement and the Wakoborun Association of Munduruku Women. In recent weeks, a well-known Munduruku woman leader witnessed suspicious activity outside her home including vehicles parked for extended periods of time and individuals taking photographs of her husband and lawyer. On the morning of March 25, the Wakoborun Association offices were attacked, burned and defaced. Unfortunately, these incidents are part of a longer-term pattern of threats to Munduruku leaders and could presage actions for politically targeted violence against them. As you may recall, community leaders and activists across the Brazilian Amazon have already fallen victims of violence and even death.

On the other hand, we are gravely concerned about the growing invasion of illegal armed miners in Munduruku territory, which poses an imminent threat to the broader communities and their environment. The Munduruku are known for being fierce defenders of their rainforest territories, and in the past have had to organize teams of forest guardians to expel miners who have infringed on their protected areas. Brazil's Federal Prosecutor's Office has sounded the alarm through press releases published on [March 16th](#) and [March 20th](#), making public denunciations against the miners' expansion into Munduruku territory and the Brazilian government's lack of measures to enforce the country's laws.

In a March 21st [public statement](#), the Munduruku Ipereg Ayu Movement demanded that, "the authorities arrest the entire gang involved, especially those who command this organization, that they be punished immediately and that their machines be removed from our territory and seized. We urge the Federal Police to urgently operate in our Mundurukânia territory to resolve once and for all the issue of the prospectors, criminals who are ending our nights of sleep and the health of our families."

The deadly threat posed by miners to the Munduruku is not new. In December of 2020, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights [issued 'precautionary measures'](#) on behalf of the

Munduruku. The Commission is also concerned about incursions of illegal miners, particularly as vectors for COVID19 which is greatly impacting Indigenous communities and has contributed to the deaths of hundreds across the Amazon.

The current Munduruku conflict is directly related to U.S. policies and economic interests in the Brazilian Amazon. For example, major U.S. based investment firms and banks such as BlackRock, Vanguard, JPMorgan Chase and Bank of America [have invested billions of dollars](#) in Anglo-American, a mining company that has attempted to secure mining permits within Munduruku territory and has faced [vociferous opposition](#).

The current dynamic of violent invasions by illegal miners counteracts the foreign assistance strategy of USAID, which, according to the State Department [Bilateral Relations Fact Sheet](#) (19 January, 2021), “engages in a long-standing strategic bilateral partnership with the Government of Brazil across several joint priorities, including biodiversity conservation in the Amazon.”

In the face of this potentially explosive situation, we believe that the United States government can and should invest diplomatic capital to encourage the Brazilian authorities to take action. We encourage you to call upon the Brazilian institutions like the Brazilian Institute of Environment and Renewable Natural Resources (IBAMA) to use their authority to address and mitigate the situation.

We encourage you to raise these urgent concerns with President Bolsonaro and Environment Minister Ricardo Salles and to inquire about the concrete actions they are taking to expel illegal miners from Munduruku territory. Undoubtedly, they have the expertise and the means, what has been clearly lacking is the political will.

The United States must stand in solidarity with the Indigenous peoples of Brazil and send a message that violence against the Munduruku people will not be tolerated or carried out with impunity.

The Munduruku people are emblematic of dozens of similar situations around the Brazilian Amazon. If the United States doesn't leverage our diplomatic capital toward a visible improvement of their situation, then our professed concern for human rights and environmental protection is worth less than the paper it is written on.

We look forward to receiving details of the actions the U.S. Embassy has taken to de-escalate and mitigate the situation the Munduruku people face.

Sincerely,



Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress

/s/
Peter A. DeFazio
Member of Congress

/s/
Jesús G. “Chuy” García
Member of Congress

/s/
Henry C. “Hank” Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress

/s/
Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress

/s/
James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

/s/
Ilhan Omar
Member of Congress

/s/
Mark Pocan
Member of Congress

/s/
Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress

/s/
Juan Vargas
Member of Congress

/s/
Susan Wild
Member of Congress

/s/
Ted W. Lieu
Member of Congress