



Amazon In Focus FALL 2023



AMAZON WATCH

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MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends of Amazon Watch,

Over the last year, hope and progress for the future of the Amazon and climate has been restored. With immense joy and pride, we celebrate recent victories to protect Indigenous land rights with the civil society consultation to **keep oil in the ground in the Yasuní National Park** in Ecuador and **the Brazilian Supreme Court ruling declaring “Marco Temporal” unconstitutional**. We are so proud and honored to have worked closely with Indigenous peoples, organizations, and movements to achieve these historic victories.

In August, the people of Ecuador voted to keep nearly 1.5 billion barrels of crude oil permanently in the ground in the Yasuni-ITT oil block to protect biodiversity and the rights of isolated Indigenous peoples. This is a truly inspiring victory that sets a precedent for a civil society-led fossil fuel phase-out across the Amazon and around the world to ensure that global temperatures do not continue to rise past 1.5 degrees C.

In Brazil, we are witnessing the restoration of respect for Indigenous land rights with the recognition and demarcation of Indigenous ancestral lands totaling more than eight hundred thousand hectares. Demarcation is the process which secures the legal right to own, manage, and protect traditional lands from all forms of extraction and destruction, including mining and agribusiness. It secures rights to self-determination and sovereignty, and protects traditional knowledge and cultural practices for future generations. To fully and permanently protect the Amazon 100% of Indigenous lands must be demarcated.

Thankfully, in September, Brazil's Supreme Court ruled against "Marco Temporal", a nefarious legal scheme that sought to completely undermine and eliminate Indigenous land rights in Brazil, and President Lula has since vetoed parliamentary attempts to undermine Indigenous rights and the constitution. With this hard-fought victory the Indigenous movement defended their territorial land rights guaranteed in the Brazilian constitution and secured hope for biodiversity and global climate balance.

These victories, as well as the growing Indigenous Women's movement across the Amazon, restore and inspire us to continue our work to protect and defend the Amazon and climate in solidarity with Indigenous peoples. As Sonia Guajajara, First Minister of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil, and long-time ally of Amazon Watch, said following the Marco Temporal victory, "We have won this battle, but we have not won the war against Indigenous rights and Mother Earth." She is right, because Indigenous lands across the Amazon continue to be threatened by large-scale industrial extraction – including oil and mineral extraction and agribusiness – further contributing to the Amazon tipping point and climate emergency.

In solidarity with our Indigenous partners and NGO allies, we are on a mission to **End Amazon Crude, Stop Amazon Mining, and Defend Earth Defenders**. Our on-the-ground field teams in Brazil, Peru, and Ecuador are strategically positioned to work closely with our partners and in coordination with our global team on local, national and international advocacy, corporate accountability, and communication campaigns to protect the Amazon, defend Indigenous rights, and advance climate justice, including at the United Nations and the Inter-American Human Rights system. This past year, our **Amazon Defenders Fund (ADF)** provided \$2 million in solidarity and emergency grants directly to our partners across the Amazon to support their priorities.

We are committed, we are inspired, and we are grateful. Thank you for partnering with us on this critical work for all of our collective future!

For the Amazon,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Leila S. Salazar".

Leila Salazar-López
Executive Director



OUR WORK

Protecting the rainforest and our climate in solidarity with Indigenous peoples

MISSION

Since 1996, Amazon Watch has protected the rainforest and advanced the rights of Indigenous peoples in the Amazon Basin. We partner with Indigenous and environmental organizations in campaigns for human rights, corporate accountability, and the preservation of the Amazon’s ecological systems.



Stop Amazon Destruction

Amazon Watch resists the destruction of the Amazon rainforest, which is perilously close to passing a tipping point of ecological collapse, by challenging and bringing global media attention to government, corporate, and financial actors complicit in deforestation, resource extraction, land grabs, rights abuses, and disastrous development projects.

Amplify Indigenous-Led Solutions

Amazon Watch amplifies the voices, stories, and solutions of Indigenous peoples to uphold their rights, lives, and territories. Amazon Watch uplifts and invests in Indigenous-led solutions for forest conservation, sustainable livelihoods, and regenerative, local economies.

Advance Climate Justice

Amazon Watch centers the voices and solutions of Indigenous peoples into policies that protect biodiversity and address the global climate crisis. Amazon Watch advocates for principled climate action that includes proposals and solutions from communities on the front lines of the climate crisis – especially Indigenous peoples and people of color – who have historically been excluded due to systemic racism and economic oppression.

VISION STATEMENT

We envision a world where the collective rights of Indigenous peoples and the rights of nature are respected; where healthy forests, biodiversity, and the global climate are fully protected. We strive for a movement of global solidarity rooted in interconnectedness and practices of decolonization to respect the rights of Indigenous peoples and to permanently protect the Amazon rainforest, a vital organ of the Earth’s biosphere, which is perilously close to passing a tipping point of ecological collapse. We believe that Indigenous self-determination is a critical component of any successful conservation strategy for the Amazon, and see that Indigenous knowledge, cultures, and traditional practices are critical to sustainable and equitable stewardship of Mother Earth. We seek solutions that will lead to the transformation of our economic, financial and political governance systems to ones that are life-affirming and regenerative. We commit, in the spirit of partnership and mutual respect, to support Indigenous, forest, and traditional peoples in their efforts to protect life, land, and culture in accordance with their aspirations and needs, by advocating for true solutions that respect the principles of climate justice.

DECOLONIZATION AND JEDI - JUSTICE, EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION

We recognize that the destruction of the Amazon is rooted in historic and perpetual colonization that began with the Spanish and Portuguese and continues via government and corporate exploitation. The driving factors of colonial, white-supremacist, and capitalist ideologies provide the justification for treating Indigenous peoples and their territories as sacrifice zones. As Amazon Watch grows in staff and influence, the organization is adopting new measures and practices to actively work for decolonization, justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion internally and externally.

Amazon Watch commits to these critical decolonization guidelines and justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) goals:

Decolonization Guidelines	JEDI Goals
Shift power to frontline communities	Staff diversity at every level and on every team of the organization
Lift up Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous systems thinking	Commitment to ongoing learning and transformation
Build equitable relationships	Institutional implementation and active practice of JEDI objectives
Practice humility and integrate lessons learned	Multi-lingual accessibility
Engage in clear and transparent communication	A culture of self and collective care
Be accountable to harm	Equitable timelines and expectations
	Skills and systems for constructive feedback and generative conflict

Global Recognition of the Leadership of Alessandra Korap Munduruku

By Christian Poirier

Last year, Amazon Watch was honored to nominate Alessandra Korap Munduruku for the prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize for her pivotal leadership in driving the British mining giant Anglo American from Munduruku lands. One of the best-known Indigenous voices in the Americas, Alessandra is a longtime partner whose collaboration with Amazon Watch dates back to the successful campaign to halt the construction of the São Luiz do Tapajós mega-dam in 2016.

Alessandra carries a fierce determination that was forged from a lifetime spent witnessing the ravages of so-called development on Indigenous lands, cultures, and wellbeing. Her personal experiences enduring the impacts of predatory industries on Munduruku territory - from soybean monocropping to illegal mining - inspired her to take on a leading role in her people's resistance to the destruction of Amazonian forests and waterways.

Upon winning the Goldman Prize, Alessandra was accompanied to



the United States by Chief Juarez Saw of Sawré Muybu village, one of the political and community hubs of Mundurukânia in the middle Tapajós River basin. Throughout their stay in San Francisco and Washington, D.C., the two leaders stressed a consistent message: the Brazilian government must uphold its constitutional duty and officially title, or demarcate, Munduruku territories. At the crux of Indigenous land rights in Brazil, Sawré Muybu territory has languished in legal limbo for decades, making it particularly vulnerable to illegal loggers, miners, and land grabbers who wreak havoc on its forests, streams, and rightful inhabitants. Without federal protections, industrial actors like Anglo American can formally seek to mine its rich mineral deposits, forcing the Munduruku and their partners to resist its activities. Meanwhile, these ancestral lands continue in a constant state of jeopardy.

It was therefore truly just when Alessandra and Juarez received news only hours before the Goldman Prize ceremony that Sawré Muybu had moved one step closer to official demarcation, clearing a key hurdle in President Lula's administration. A week later, the administration announced that another non-demarcated Munduruku land in the middle Tapajós - Sawré Bap'in - had also moved closer to official titling. Such uplifting news felt particularly auspicious in light of the hellish scenario Indigenous peoples previously faced under Bolsonaro, and it was particularly well-timed given the global recognition that Alessandra and the Munduruku were receiving.

Alessandra is the first to recognize that such victories, while remarkable, can be short-lived and that the struggle must continue. It is an honor and an inspiration to work alongside her in friendship and support her powerful and decisive leadership.



Davi Kopenawa Yanomami
Photo: Bruno Kelly/Amazônia Real

Keeping Brazil's "Blood Gold" out of the Global Market

By Christian Poirier

The scourge of illegal gold mining on Indigenous lands is among the most heartbreaking destructive forces facing Amazonian peoples today. While the activity has existed for decades across the Amazon, its recent explosion in Brazil has been

particularly acute, where it grew 787% between 2016 and 2022. And while illegal mining - what's known as "garimpo" in Brazil - has previously been carried out by small-scale "artisanal" miners, today's garimpo is a lavishly financed billion-dollar industry with close ties to powerful organized criminal networks, politicians, and the private sector.

The impacts on the Amazon's highly preserved Indigenous territories - particularly those of the Yanomami, Munduruku, and Kayapó people - are immeasurable. The miners scour streams and riverbeds, causing deforestation and polluting critical freshwater resources with sediments and mercury, which is used to separate gold from other minerals. These activities have led to a rise in lethal illnesses, as well as brain, kidney, and skin afflictions caused by water poisoning. This is all in addition to the intense social conflicts triggered by the invasion of illegal miners, such as armed violence, drug trafficking, murder, and sexual predation of Indigenous women and children. As a result of this crisis, Indigenous communities are experiencing a multifaceted emergency, as their health, safety, territories, and cultural integrity are under relentless assault.

Brazil's Indigenous movement refers to garimpo gold as "blood gold" because the commodity is so perilous to Indigenous lands and



Photo: Bruno Kelly/Amazônia Real

lives. In this spirit, Amazon Watch and the Association of Brazil's Indigenous Peoples (APIB) launched a report entitled "Complicity in Destruction V: Blood Gold" during Climate Week in 2022, detailing global market relationships that enable the horror of Brazil's illegal gold industry and the trade of this conflict commodity, which flourishes due to shocking policy loopholes and lack of oversight of both Brazilian and international actors.

While the Brazilian government plays a leading role in allowing this illegal economy to operate, with half of the country's gold exports believed to be of illegal origins, the same is true of the countries that import this gold, the companies that refine it, and the corporations that put it in their products and pass it off to us in our phones, electric cars, and jewelry. Amazon Watch is putting these corporations - from Apple to Tesla to Tiffany's - on notice in an engagement strategy meant to leverage the power of global market leaders to ultimately influence Brazilian policymakers to put an end to the illegal gold industry.



Peru - Yankuntich Assembly 2023. Photo: Handrez Garcia/Amazon Watch

Indigenous Nations Take on Multibillion-Dollar Firms

By Mary Mijares

Amazonian Indigenous peoples remain undeterred in their struggles against institutions that threaten their ancestral lands and worsen climate catastrophe. In the past year, Amazon Watch amplified calls to

action from the ground by waging international campaigns against companies that pose material harm to local communities.

At the center of Wall Street, it was as if worlds collided that day. In a conference room overlooking New York City, I sat at the head of an imposing conference table where, to my left, a Peruvian delegation with leaders from Amazonian Indigenous nations, the Achuar and Wampís, and Cabo Blanco's Fishing Association, occupied that side of the table.

To my right, representatives from the international multibillion-dollar bank and investment firm, Goldman Sachs, were seated at attention.

The Peruvian leaders, appointed by their communities and accompanied by Amazon Watch, journeyed thousands of miles to confront banks about their financing of an oil company that continues to undermine their rights and environment. The bank representatives never once averted their gaze as leaders warned: **any corporation or financial**

institution that threatens our lands, livelihoods, and survival will be met with resistance.

Unbeknownst to many, financial institutions can serve as enablers for extractive industries that poison the air and homes of millions. This financing continues in the backdrop of the hottest weeks ever recorded during a year filled with intensifying typhoons, floods, fires, and drought. Such calamities systematically hit poor and marginalized communities the hardest, as well as frontline defenders who steward lands across the world.

As part of our organization's initiative, **End Amazon Crude**, the **Petroperú campaign** seeks to expose the connections between international financiers and the Peruvian state-run oil company – a company marred by corporate scandals, disregard of Indigenous rights, and environmental degradation from oil pollution. Despite these impacts, international financiers with climate commitments still financially support Petroperú notwithstanding their “due diligence” processes.

To counter the company's claims Amazon Watch published "The Risks of Investing in Petroperú." This comprehensive document, made possible by our team's research and information from communities on the ground, lays bare the countless threats and potential consequences

of supporting Petroperú's operations. It highlights the staggering \$5.3 billion in long-term financing the company has received and lists the known financiers perpetuating its destructive activities, including the controversial Talara Refinery Modernization Project.

Any financing to this company, and this project, is likely to lead to more oil exploration and extraction in sensitive areas. Such concessions include Block 64, which overlaps **Achuar and Wampís** territories, and Blocks X and Z-2B on the Peruvian coast, where local fishing communities, such as the **Cabo Blanco Fishing Association**, rely on thriving marine habitats for their livelihoods. Our report also details the company's disastrous management of the North Peruvian Pipeline, which frequently leaks oil that runs into the rivers and soil in the rainforest, undermining both the Amazon's rich biodiversity and the lives of its people.

We sent this report to over ten financial institutions known to finance Petroperú, which resulted in statements of concern from European banks, such as BNP Paribas and Deutsche Bank. It also served as a catalyst for in-person discussions between the Peruvian delegation – consisting of leaders from the Achuar and Wampís nations, and the Cabo Blanco Fishing Association – and representatives from some of the world's largest banks, such as

Deutsche Bank, Citi, JPMorgan Chase, Bank of America, and Goldman Sachs.

From Frankfurt, Germany to New York City, members of the delegation came face to face with bank representatives and spoke about the consequences of extractivism on their territories and the direct harm that financing Petroperú can inflict on their homes. In Pennsylvania, the delegation also took on the second-largest asset manager, **Vanguard**. Leaders demonstrated and spoke outside Vanguard's headquarters alongside over 100 allies committed to the climate justice movement, exposing the company's controversial deals and motivating young activists.

To this day, we continue to be agile and responsive to new information, finding additional ways to expose potential financiers of Petroperú through regular company monitoring and research which enhance our campaigning alongside communities.

As Indigenous nations and civil societies continue to resist, allies abroad must remain steadfast, and ensure that leaders' stories and calls to action reverberate in corporate offices and in mobilizations calling for corporate accountability. After all, the preservation of the Amazon and our ongoing support for its stewards is crucial for securing a collective future, not only for us but for future generations.



Yasuní Triumph: A Beacon for the Amazon and Beyond

By Kevin Koenig

On August 20, 2023, Ecuador made a groundbreaking decision that reverberated across the globe. Despite challenges like political unrest and economic instability, Ecuadorians voted overwhelmingly to prioritize the environment and Indigenous rights over oil interests. Nearly 60% supported the initiative to halt the country's largest oil project, ensuring

that approximately 1.5 billion barrels of crude remain untouched beneath the Amazon.

Yasuní National Park, a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve, is a treasure trove of biodiversity. Nestled on the equator, it boasts over 120 reptile species, 596 bird species, 200 mammal species, and a staggering 100,000 insect species in just one hectare. Beneath this rich tapestry, the Ishpingo, Tiputini, and Tambocochoa (ITT) oil fields hold an estimated 1.67 billion barrels of crude. The recent vote mandates the closure of 225 active wells and the removal of all oil infrastructure within a year. Additionally, a separate ballot

measure successfully banned new mining activities in the province of Quito.

This vote is a testament to Ecuador's commitment to the Amazon, Indigenous communities, and the global climate. It's a bold step towards safeguarding the last Indigenous groups in Ecuador who choose to live in isolation. Ecuador's stance sets a precedent for the world, emphasizing the urgency to transition away from fossil fuels to prevent a looming climate disaster.

The journey to this victory spanned over two decades, with grassroots movements and environmental



advocates tirelessly campaigning for Yasuní's protection. Amazon Watch stood at the forefront of this battle, spearheading international coalitions, raising awareness, and offering legal aid during crucial junctures. Our dedication never wavered, even in the face of adversity.

This decision sends a potent message to global investors and financial institutions: the age of unbridled resource extraction is drawing to a close. The world must heed Ecuador's call, understanding that certain resources must remain undisturbed and that transitioning fairly and justly is non-negotiable.

The global cry to "End Fossil Fuels" and specifically to "End Amazon Crude" is louder than ever. Research from expert organizations like the International Energy Agency underscores the necessity to keep a significant portion of known fossil fuel reserves untouched to limit global warming to 1.5° C to protect our global climate. Central to this mission is the preservation of the Amazon rainforest, with the defense of Indigenous rights and territories being paramount.

However, challenges persist. Despite the clear mandate to cease oil activities in Yasuní, both the outgoing Lasso government and state oil

company Petroecuador have declared that it would be "impossible" to comply. The world watches intently, ensuring that Ecuador respects its commitment to Yasuní and a just and sustainable future.

While we celebrate this monumental success, there are also other oil blocks within Yasuní that still pose threats. The task ahead is to amplify this victory, making it a guiding light for environmental and Indigenous rights protection, not only in Ecuador but across the globe.



Photo: Lou Dematteis/Spectral O/Redux



Photo: @kauescarim

Mobilizing for Justice: Amazon Defenders Fund for Indigenous Autonomy and Grassroots Power

By Angela Martínez

Amazon Watch's Amazon Defenders Fund (ADF) has been a vanguard of meaningful solidarity and a catalyst for Indigenous autonomy and environmental justice. Steeped in principles like interconnectedness, relationality, and reciprocity—cornerstones of Indigenous cosmology—the ADF mobilizes direct, unbureaucratic, timely, and flexible solidarity funding to respond directly to the priorities of Amazonian peoples.

Mobilizing Solidarity

Amazon Watch now channels nearly one-third of our budget directly to Amazonian grassroots initiatives via the ADF. With an unyielding focus on self-determination, we've quadrupled our solidarity grantmaking, supporting both historical and emerging Indigenous leaders to address urgent crises such as the Amazon fires, the COVID-19 pandemic, and escalating threats against Earth Defenders.

Community Priorities at the Forefront

Between July 2022 and June 2023, the ADF channeled a groundbreaking \$2 million through 248 grants to 126 diverse Indigenous peoples and movements. This surge in financial support reflects the urgent needs of frontline communities contending with escalating existential threats, from environmental destruction to human rights abuses.

A cornerstone of timely solidarity has been consistent and robust backing for Brazil's Free Land Camp. As the country's largest Indigenous mobilization, in 2023 it united 6,000 Indigenous voices from 200 different ethnic backgrounds, all rallying to elevate Indigenous land rights and combat the climate crises. President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, a guest of the Free Land Camp, officially announced the demarcation of six ancestral Indigenous lands at the event. Our sustained commitment to facilitating the participation of strong Amazonian delegations emanates from years of dedicated organizing and partnership, reinforcing the pivotal role ADF plays as a first responder in Indigenous and grassroots initiatives.

Women at the Vanguard

Recognizing that women are often the backbone of these movements, ADF mobilizes resources to elevate their leadership. For example, in Ecuador,

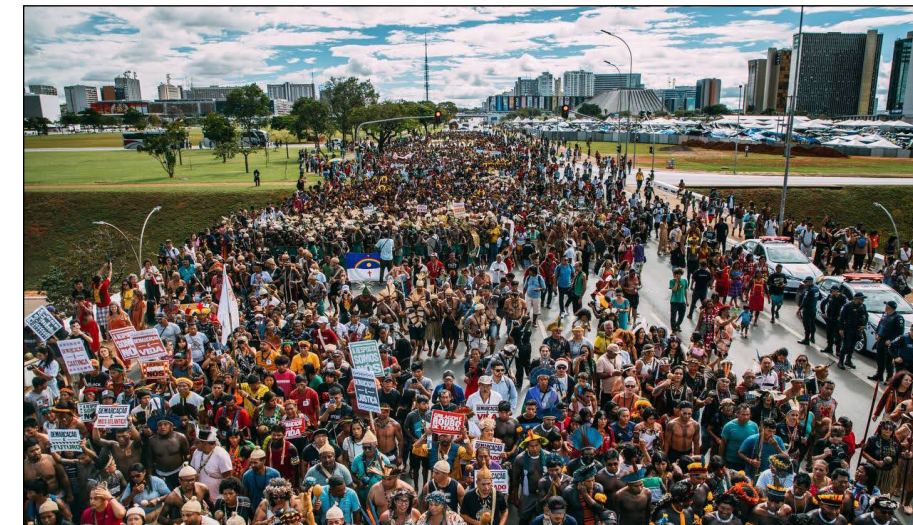


Photo: Raissa Azeredo @raissaazeredo | @aldayaorg

we've supported CONFENIAE in organizing women to combat gender violence at familial, communal, and state levels. In Peru, our funding has nurtured the vision of the Chapra nation's first female president, Olivia Bisa. We've also backed the Indigenous Women's March in Brasília, echoing their call to "Reforest minds to cure the Earth."

A Living Tapestry of Solutions

Every Indigenous community is a keeper of profound wisdom that can teach us how to live in harmony with the Earth. The ADF is committed to amplifying these voices, weaving together a living tapestry of solutions through consistent support. We've learned that even small contributions can serve as tributaries in a greater river, flowing towards the life of the

forest and its peoples.

Visionary Resilience and Future Commitments

In these times of crisis and transformation, ADF moves at the pace of the Indigenous movement: constantly in motion, resolute, and unbreakable. As we look ahead, we strive to further scale ADF's regranteeing process and grow our commitment to accompany Indigenous peoples and organizations.

In the spirit of true solidarity and guided by the age-old knowledge of our Indigenous partners, we invite you to join us. Together, we can work to dismantle colonial paradigms and nurture a future where justice, autonomy, and Earth-aligned living are not just ideals, but lived realities.



COP15 Biodiversity March. December 2022. Photo: Kamikia Kisedje/APIB

Expanding International Advocacy to Protect the Amazon

By Gisela Hurtado, Sofia Jarrin, and Gabriela Sarment

In recent years, Amazon Watch has expanded its U.S. staff and international team to engage in new advocacy strategies to defend the Amazon. As always, this work is done with the strategic participation of our Indigenous partners.

Decision-makers and policy shapers from across the globe frequently come together to combat climate

change, safeguard our planet, and protect the Amazon. It is crucial that our Indigenous allies are right there, side by side with them, with a seat at the table when policies that affect their lives and territories are being discussed. After all, who understands the delicate balance of nature better than the Indigenous peoples who have lived in harmony with it for generations?

Their voices need to be heard, we must be guided by their wisdom, and their solutions are invaluable in saving our planet from environmental degradation, the alarming loss of biodiversity, and the threats of oil, mining, and illegal economies. That is why we work tirelessly to provide them with tools and expertise to ensure they have the opportunity to influence policies in these high-level spaces.

Last year, for example, we accompanied Amazonian Indigenous partners from Brazil and Peru at COP 15, the Conference on Biodiversity, held in Montreal, Canada. It was a powerful moment, where their voices resonated inside the Palais des Congres as heads of states adopted the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. We were there to promote their participation in the Indigenous Caucus and accompany them to meetings with government representatives.

Our support extended well beyond this conference. During our visit to Canada, we accompanied the largest Indigenous coalition from Brazil in denouncing the threats of Canadian mining company Belo Sun. We established and reinforced alliances with Canadian civil society and Indigenous organizations. While Canada is presenting itself as a human rights champion, Canadian companies operating abroad are violating human rights in Latin America. We came up with an

unprecedented strategy to expose this hypocrisy.

Together with over 50 civil society organizations, we led a groundbreaking effort to report on more than 37 Canadian projects across Latin America and the Caribbean. Alarming findings emerged – over 26 of these projects violated Indigenous rights, 27 were located in fragile ecosystems like the Amazon, and 32 violated the right to a clean environment.

Amazon Watch's team members have expertise in U.N. mechanisms for country evaluations. Together with Josefina Tunki – president of the Shuar Arutam people – and the Collective on Chinese Finance and Investment, we participated in the evaluation of China before the Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (CESCR). These collective efforts have yielded results, as the CESCR issued compelling recommendations to China. Among them, the call to hold companies and banks accountable for human rights violations beyond their borders and to ensure justice and reparation for corporate abuse.

Leveraging this experience, we are strategically utilizing the findings on Canadian operations abroad for the next Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Canada. This process allows U.N. member states to review the human rights records of other nations. Amazon Watch accompanied a coalition of Indigenous leaders, local

communities, and Latin American civil society representatives to Geneva, Switzerland, during the last week of August. Together, we exposed the predatory practices of Canada's extractive sectors operating in Latin America and the Caribbean, actively supported by the "economic diplomacy strategy" of the Canadian government.

Looking ahead, building on the lessons learned from the UPR process, we are gearing up to support our Indigenous partners' participation in the world's largest mining industry convention, the Prospectors & Developers Association of Canada (PDAC). At this event, we will be exposing and denouncing two Canadian mining companies – Belo Sun and Solaris Resources – that are threatening the Shuar Arutam and other Indigenous peoples from Ecuador and Brazil. We have already launched financial campaigns against these companies and issued several "Risk Assessment" reports designed to discourage investment and financing.

The participation of our Indigenous partners in international spaces has been transformative, infusing our efforts with a profound sense of purpose and a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of our global ecosystem.



Peru - Yankuntich Assembly 2023. Photo: Handrez García/Amazon Watch

The Peruvian Amazon: New Threats, Same Determination

By Ricardo Pérez and Vladimir Pinto

While political and legal victories shine in the headlines, the real battle for protecting Peru's Indigenous Peoples in Isolation or Initial Contact (PIACI) is waged in the Amazon's thick foliage and remote villages.

Peru is home to approximately 25 Indigenous groups in isolation, with seven recognized PIACI reserves and five more that are still pending following requests by the Interethnic

Association for the Development of the Peruvian Rainforest (AIDSESP).

The recent defeat of Bill 3518, aimed at eradicating all PIACI reserves, was a significant win achieved through global solidarity. Yet the threat remains, as Indigenous ancestral lands are increasingly encroached upon by illegal activities.

The Rising Tide of Drug Trafficking

On the very day that Peru's Congress debated amending the PIACI Law, we collaborated with the Native Federation of Kakataibo Communities (FENACOKA) to send out a critical press release that warned of renewed drug transport activities from

concealed airstrips in the Kakataibo Reserve and neighboring villages that guard it. The news put thousands of families on alert once again, because when drug flights are reactivated, the presence of armed men follows and threats and intimidation of community leaders increase.

Located mostly in the Ucayali region, Kakataibo territory encompasses five threatened PIACI reserves, including Isconahua, Kakataibo North and South, Mashco Piro, and Murunahua. These areas, already in peril, are further compromised as adjacent lands remain unprotected against a rising wave of intrusions.

The Ministry of Culture's aerial surveillance unveiled clandestine

airstrips within the Kakataibo Reserve. One of the most recent photographs taken during these flights confirmed the existence of a third covert airstrip used for drug shipments, turning more of the Kakataibo territory into a narcotics transportation nexus.

We stand firmly with leaders like Herlin Odicio of FENACOKA, who tirelessly decries that earlier efforts to replace coca crops with alternative development projects have been undermined due to the Peruvian government's inaction. FENACOKA's call for centering Indigenous territories in anti-drug strategies remains largely ignored, as local governments facilitate drug trafficking and land invasions.

Forestry Concessions: A Pathway to Further Exploitation

Powerful forces not just in Congress but also in local governments share a vested interest in dismantling PIACI territories. In Kakataibo lands, local authorities continue granting forest concessions even within the Northern Kakataibo Reserve. Astonishingly, one concession owner had the audacity to sue the Peruvian government, arguing that the reserve infringed upon his "right to work."

Though such lawsuits will likely falter in the Constitutional Court, they serve as detrimental stalling tactics. Roads constructed for "legal" timber



Peru - Yankuntich Assembly 2023. Photo: Handrez García/Amazon Watch

extraction have become deforestation hotspots and doorways for more extensive illegal activities, including drug trafficking.

A United Front for Climate Justice and Indigenous Rights

Our alliance with Indigenous organizations such as FENACOKA and AIDSESP aims to change the flawed systems perpetuating these injustices. We advocate for a holistic approach that adheres to principles of climate justice while prioritizing free and secure Indigenous territories as the most effective protection measure. We are in the final stages of crafting a new policy paper that will encapsulate these principles and establish an aligned strategy for lasting change.

As we move forward, we will continue supporting Indigenous defenders across the Peruvian Amazon. They are the frontline warriors against not only environmental destruction but also the propagation of false narratives that minimize the gravity of these urgent challenges.

The fight to protect the Peruvian Amazon is a complex tapestry of environmental conservation, human rights, and policy change. It's a battle that demands not just legal wins but robust, on-the-ground defenses against insidious threats like drug trafficking and illegal logging.

Join us as we stand with our Indigenous partners in confronting these combined threats, in defense of their lands and the future of our planet.

Ecuador's Indigenous Communities Rise Against Extractivism

By Nathaly Yépez, Paola Maldonado, and Raphael Hoetmer

In the past year, Ecuador has witnessed a significant erosion of its democratic fabric, marked by a surge in violence and political instability. This deterioration culminated in the

dissolution of the national government, prompting early elections. The tragic assassination of presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio further intensified the crisis.

Ecuador now has the highest increase of homicides in the region, with a fivefold rise between 2016 and 2021 and an 82% increase in 2022 alone. The government's repressive responses, which include constant states of emergency, relaxing gun laws, and deploying armed forces for internal security, has not only been ineffective but has also heightened risks for human rights defenders.

Indigenous Territories Under Threat

Against this backdrop, the outgoing Lasso government's push for expanding mining and oil industries has added pressure on Indigenous territories. A notable instance was an executive decree in May that turned the right to consultation into a mere administrative procedure, paving the way for extractive projects.

The National Mining Sector Development Plan projects that by 2030, medium and large mining concessions will cover approximately

11 percent of the country. The Shuar Arutam People's (PSHA) territory in the Southern Amazon is particularly at risk, as they resist both the Panantza-San Carlos and Warintza mining projects. Additionally, small-scale illegal mining is on the rise, especially in the Napo province.

Hope and Resistance from Indigenous Communities

Despite these challenges, Indigenous communities remain steadfast on their path to self-determination. A significant victory came in September 2022 when Ecuador's Constitutional Court ruled in favor of the Shuar people, stating that the Panantza-San Carlos mining project of the Chinese company EXSA violated their right to consultation. This ruling was a result of a lawsuit filed by PSHA with our legal counsel.

The Shuar Arutam people have reinforced their opposition to mining since electing their new president, Jaime Palomino, to succeed Josefina Tunki, the organization's first woman president who had brought national and international attention to their struggle. In June 2023, in collaboration with national Indigenous leaders, they presented the Popular Anti-mining Mandate, urging the government to declare all of Ecuador to be a mining-free zone.

Our report on the Solaris Resources project highlights the risks of the

Canadian mining initiative in the Cordillera del Condor region, one of the most biodiverse places in Ecuador. The Shuar Arutam People did not give their consent, despite attempts to divide and co-opt community leaders.

Earth Defenders Continue Fighting Despite Grave Risks

However, defending their rights and territories comes at a cost. Indigenous leaders face threats, criminalization, and even violence. The brutal murder of Cofán leader Eduardo Mendúa, a key organizer of the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE), underscores the grave risks they face. Only hours earlier at a

CONAIE assembly, Mendúa had ratified his resistance to new oil extraction in his community. Amazon Watch stands in solidarity, demanding truth, justice, and reparations for his murder.

The resilience of Indigenous leaders, even in challenging times, illuminates a path forward and gives hope for the response to the climate emergency and fight against fossil fuels. Their struggles highlight the environmental and societal threats posed by the mining industry, and their political proposals offer a blueprint for a truly equitable transition. We remain committed to supporting these guardians of life and advocating for their rights.



Josefina Tunki & Pueblo Shuar Arutam No Mining Campaign Ecuador. Photo: Lluvia Comunicaciones



In honor of and in gratitude to Kathryn "Katy" Montgomery Allen

From the rainforests of Peru to West Africa, Katy Allen loved rainforests, rivers, and all of nature. She was passionate about protecting animals and helping people from the Amazon to her hometown of Santa Barbara. We are so grateful for her dedicated support to Amazon Watch over the years and for sharing her legacy with us. We mourn her passing and share our deepest sentiments with her family and friends.



Photo: @giulianmartins

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in solidarity with Indigenous peoples

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