

# BRAZIL

## CRISIS IN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AFFECTS THE YONOMAMI

(Brazil) September 10, 1992. The current crisis in the Brazilian federal government has had strong repercussions on the Yanomami. As all attention and activity is centered on the corruption scandal in Brasilia, government agency budgets are not being disbursed as planned.

In a letter dated August 31 health workers employed by the National Health Foundation (FNS) in the state of Roraima to work in the Yanomami Health District notified Waldir Joao Ferreira da Silva, the then FNS coordinator in Roraima who was just dismissed, of

their withdrawal from the 17 health posts in the Yanomami area. In the letter, they cited dwindling resources to fly to areas affected by malaria (the team had 20 hours of flight time available as of September 1) and lack of essential medicines, espe-

cially Mefloquina used to combat malaria - entirely unavailable in the Yanomami Health District (DSY) since the middle of August.

Equipment requested to spray the breeding grounds of malaria-bearing mosquitoes had not been provided and the incidence of malaria is increasing. There were more than 4,000 cases recorded in the last six months. In some places, more than half the population has died of the disease. Health workers and the Indians affected by diseases did not have adequate food supplies. Furthermore, large proportion of the Indians are too ill to plant their fields, affecting next year's food supply.

The letter, signed by 13 of the DSY health workers, accuses the FNS of being slow and unwilling to meet health needs in the area. In the Casa do Indio in Boa

Vista, about half the 120 patients are Yanomami, mostly malaria victims. At the beginning of September, there was only two weeks' supply of food left, provided by the Dutch branch of Medecins sans Frontieres. The Casa do Indio would be swamped with new patients if flights continued to bring in emergency cases from the Yanomami area. News reports noted that the Yanomami were increasingly resistant to medical treatment which has been irregular, inadequate and therefore ineffective.

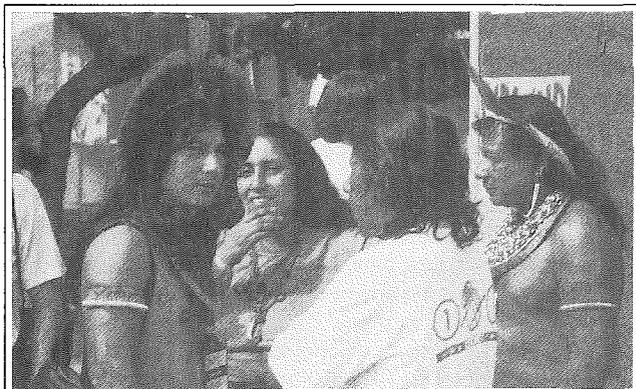
The garimpeiros (miners) have not missed their chance, inciting the Yanomami to react against FUNAI and FNS staff. Some Yanomami invaded a post in Baixo Mucajal, taking food and gasoline. The garimpeiros have supplied the Yanomami with food and guns as they invade the reserve once again. They now number about 2,000.

Sydney Possuelo, the President of FUNAI, met with FUNAI regional administrators last month to ask for their support to work out a strategy to rescue the agency's work. Possuelo would like FUNAI to take back responsibility for Indian health care - given to the FNS two years ago when FUNAI's work was decentralized. At stake is the disbursement over the Cr\$90 billion allocated to the Ministry of Health for health work among the indigenous population.

FUNAI, with a budget of Cr\$870 million, is strapped for funds as the National Health Foundation (FNS) whose funds are embargoed because of government expenditure cuts. After meeting regional administrators Possuelo visited Clio Borja, the Minister of Justice, requesting that military helicopters be used to visit the most critical Yanomami areas. These visits will be carried out over a period of four days to remove emergency cases, investigate invasions by garimpeiros, and will probably lead to an evaluation that will provide the basis for further FUNAI lobbying to reassume responsibility for the health work.

Dinarte Nobre de Madeiro, the former coordinator of the successful operation to remove garimpeiros prior

*Continued on page 12*



*Brazilian delegates at the Rio conference. Photo SAIIC*

—from page 11

to demarcation of Yanomami land, visited the Commander of the Armed Forces in the Amazon on September 3 to ask for the helicopters to be released. Meanwhile, Possuelo is calling in FUNAI employees with health care training to work on an emergency basis in the Yanomami area. The aim of the DSY health workers in Roraima, all of them committed to Yanomami rights, is to force the government to take responsibility for the work.

There was some friction between the group and Waldir Joao Ferreira da Silva, who has since been asked to leave his post after being appointed temporarily by the FNS in Brasilia as part of a team that is investigating administrative irregularities of his predecessor. The DSY workers allege that he and the FNS in Brasilia were to blame for the situation because they did not provide necessary support for Yanomami health work, which continues to be critically important.

Waldir's reputation among DSY health workers worsened when, at a meeting held in Manaus in July, he unctuously declared that any permanent appointee to his post would have to be approved by Roraima politicians. If this is so, the next appointment could be tragic for the Yanomami. The FNS in Brasilia is under constant pressure by congressmen from Roraima to accept their nominees to state-level posts, including the one which was occupied by Waldir. Sydney Possuelo of FUNAI is against intervention by local governments in the appointment of officials who work with indigenous peoples.

The President of FNS, in a meeting with CCPY on August 25, gave assurances that until the investigation ends the administrator will be a career civil servant in the FNS. After the investigation, it will be necessary to make a permanent appointment of someone who understands the importance of the work done in the DSY and is at the same time capable of overseeing all FNS work in Roraima. The same Roraima political group has continued to be active in the Yanomami issue; the Di rio de Roraima reported that Chico Rodrigues, a federal deputy, had been told by President Collor that he would review the demarcation of the Yanomami area. Although this would be very difficult, the statement reflects the unwillingness of this political force to recognize Yanomami land rights.

## YANOMAMI INDIANS ARE DYING IN BRAZIL FOR LACK OF HEALTH WORKERS AND MEDICINE

The Yesinabetheri is a 13-member Yanomami group structured around three brothers and a sister. They live in the state of Roraima, in Amazonia and just a few days ago they were fourteen in number. The middle brother, known as Fraquinho ("weakie") died, probably from malaria. He was the only member of the group whose wife was at a child-bearing age. The elder brother, Chiquinho, is raising an orphan to become his wife. The younger brother, Kobaxi, works with a family of another group in order to have permission to marry one of its daughters. Chiquinho's and Kobaxi's wives died. Kobaxi was left alone with a 10-day old infant who is being taken care of by officials of the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI).

The sister of the three Yanomami Indians is married and has a daughter aged five. Chiquinho has a son aged twenty who is single, and a 10-year old daughter, who is married. A woman who is the younger sister of their late mother also lives with them. Old Arabitheriyoma (which means "woman from a place full of macaws") relates that, in addition to Kobaxi's and Chiquinho's wives, their sons, the elder brother and all other members of the family died after the arrival of gold prospectors in their region. Hundreds of Yanomami Indians have died mainly because of the presence of gold prospectors in their traditional territory.

In July, only three members of the Yesinabetherai group did not catch malaria. 39 cases of malaria were reported this year; some of the Yanomami caught the disease more than once. Their house was abandoned. The crops they tried to grow between malaria crises are still unproductive. They all spend most of their time in the surrounding of a small station that was set up to provide assistance to Yanomami Indians living in a region known as Parafuri.

The deceased brother was nicknamed Fraquinho ("weakie") when he first met the gold prospectors. After his first contacts with the invaders, he became ill and got thinner and thinner. He died anemia and showing signs of hepatitis. He needed a blood transfusion but none of the other local Yanomai Indians could be the donor, since all of them either had malaria or were undernourished.

Source: CIMI-Indianist Missionary Council