



"YANOMAMI LAND"—THE FARCE OF DEMARCATION

President José Sarney has taken an unusual action to open up for development lands which only two months earlier had been reserved for the use of the Yanomami Indians. Interministerial Decree 250, on November 18th, annulled a measure that had guaranteed the Yanomami "permanent possession" of a National Park and two National Forests carved out of their lands. Instead, the Yanomami will have "preferential," but not exclusive use of these ancestral territories.

The Yanomami are the largest Native group in the world still not in permanent contact with the national society. As the demarcation of their land, executed by the Brazilian military as part of their 'Calha Norte' program, now stands, the Yanomami could lose as much as 70% of their land. The government has recognized lands in the vicinity of Yanomami villages as 19 "Indian Colonies," but these offer little protection to the semi-nomadic Yanomami in the wake of an invasion by 40,000 gold panners and the presence of a large contingent of Brazilian soldiers in the border area.

Many observers feel that the President's actions are designed to pave the way for larger-scale mineral exploitation in the area, which contains rich reserves of gold, uranium, cassiterite, and strategic minerals.

Already, rivers in the Yanomami area have been polluted by the gold miners, who use large quantities of mercury to purify the gold. The Yanomami have no antibodies to protect them against diseases brought in by the miners and soldiers, and health workers from the Catholic Church and the Commission for the Creation of a Yanomami Park (CCPY) have been expelled from the Yanomami area by the government.



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