

# Gold Miners Invade Yanomami Area, Again

Since the government suspended its surveillance operation of the Yanomami area on March, 1996, thousands of gold prospectors have re-invaded the Yanomami area in Northern Brazil. Since then there has been no attempt by FUNAI (National Indian Foundation), the police, or the armed forces to stop the gold miners from invading the demarcated Yanomami area.

Davi Kopenawa Yanomami, the Yanomami representative leader, writes:

Demini 05 de Junho de 1996.

Caros amigos,  
escrevo esta carta para dizer

que nós Yanomami mandamos a nossa mensagem para vocês. nós Yanomami estamos muito preocupado porque a nossa área Yanomami está sendo invadida de novo pelos Garimpeiros. É por isso que nós Yanomami estamos informando que os Garimpeiros estão no meio do rio Catrimani e no alto Catrimani. Eles estão também ao redor de Xiteia, Homoxi, Papiú e Parafur no momento há 35 pistas de pouso ilegais em área Yanomami e o número de Garimpeiros chegou a 3.000 no Brasil e 4.000 na Venezuela. nós Yanomami queremos a ajuda de você para divulgar estas notícias sobre a invasão dos Garimpeiros. Pedimos que esta denuncia seja transmitida para vários países da Europa e nos Estados Unidos para que eles tomem conhecimento do que está ocorrendo de novo área Yanomami. Pedimos que as organizações destes países, que apoiam a questão indígena enviem cartas ao Presidente do Brasil pedindo que ele libere verbas para a operação de retirada dos Garimpeiros para que acabe

Letter sent by David Kopenawa in the hopes of stopping the latest invasion of Yanomami lands.

"We Yanomami send a message to you. We are very worried that our Yanomami area is being again invaded by gold miners. This is why we Yanomami are informing that the gold miners are in the river Catrimani and the high Catrimani. They are also around Xiteia, Homoxi, Papiú, and for the moment there are 35 illegal runways in the Yanomami area. The number of gold miners has arrived at 3000 in Brazil and 4000 in Venezuela.

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"We Yanomami want help from you to publicize the invasion of gold miners. We ask that this denouncement arrive to the various countries of Europe and the United States so that they know what is happening in the Yanomami area. We ask that the organizations of those countries support us and send letters to the President of Brazil asking that he free the funds for the operation of removing the gold miners so this situation ends."

The invasion of the gold miners has set off a dramatic rise in malaria cases, and resulted in the deaths of at least three Indians, shot with guns supplied by gold miners. In April alone 12 Yanomami died from malaria and pneumonia. Tuberculosis and venereal diseases are also increasing throughout the Yanomami area. The gold miners are also supplying guns and ammunition to the Yanomami in exchange for food or sexual relations with Yanomami women. The presence of guns has heightened the level of

violence among the Yanomami, leading to numerous deaths and injuries. One Yanomami leader lost the use of an arm after being shot. In early May three Yanomami were shot dead during tribal conflicts. There are reports that gold miners are encouraging tribal conflicts.

FUNAI officials fear that at any moment Venezuela will also expel several thousand more Brazilian gold miners who crossed the border as the result of earlier evictions from the Yanomami area. FUNAI also said that planes have been seen flying over the Parima, Catrimani, Parafuri, Paapi, Xidea, and other rivers in the area. The miners and

their machinery have been seen working in the Catrimani Paapiu Aracaca, Curimata, and Mapula rivers.

The Yanomami reserve was officially demarcated by the Brazilian government in 1992 after international protests over the mass invasion of up to 40,000 gold miners at the end of the 1980's. Fifteen percent of the Yanomami population died as a result.

Besides the terrible effect on the Yanomami people, the presence of the gold prospectors also causes huge environmental damage, contaminating rivers and destroying riverbanks and forest.

The good results obtained by the Comissão Pró-Yanomami's (CCPY) health programme, will be completely undermined if the invasion is allowed to continue.

For the Yanomami it is a matter of life and death. For the Brazilian government it would be a matter of honoring their word. During his recent visit to Europe Justice Minister Nelson Jobim promised that the federal police and the armed forces would be used to expel the gold prospectors. ❖

*Information from CCPY (Comissão Pró-Yanomami) See below.*

**We urge you to appeal to President Fernando Henrique Cardoso to free the funds needed (approximately US \$6 million) to restart the miner removal operation.**

**Sample letter:**

Presidente Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Palácio do Planalto, 70159-970, Brasília DF Brazil; Fax: 061-226-7566

Dear President Cardoso,

The survival of an ancient people, the Yanomami, is in your hands.

The Yanomami are known throughout the world as one of the last large groups of Indigenous peoples who have been recently contacted. Now they are threatened by a new illegal invasion of gold miners and your inexplicable delay in authorizing the funds needed for their expulsion, an operation already jointly planned by different departments of your government in cooperation with the government of Venezuela.

We would like to remind you that on 29/3/96 in London, Justice Minister Nelson Jobim promised the international press and non-governmental organizations that this operation was imminent. Three months have passed and nothing has been done to stop the entry of new gold miners or remove those who are illegally inside the demarcated Yanomami area.

We know from reports from the area itself that the consequences for the Yanomami are disastrous: there has been an increase of malaria and venereal diseases and cases of injuries and even deaths caused by firearms supplied to the Indians by gold miners. Many rivers are being polluted and contaminated.

A visit by members of the Human Rights Commission of the OAS to the Yanomami area in December, 1995, found that a binational operation to put an end to the chronic problem of invasions on both sides of the frontier by mostly Brazilian gold miners was needed.

The international community expects that you, Mr. President, will fulfill your commitments and protect a people who are vulnerable, but have the same right to life as anyone else.

Therefore we appeal to you to free the necessary funds for the operation to remove the gold miners who have illegally entered into the Yanomami reserve in Brazil immediately and introduce a system of permanent vigilance to prevent them returning.

Yours sincerely,

For more information contact:

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