



Flu Threatens to Annihilate the Nukak

(Colombia) One of Colombia's last nomadic peoples, the Nukak, are being decimated by outside diseases. Their numbers have already been brought dangerously low by continual attacks from colonists and coca growers. Over 100 Nukak have died from flu over the last three years. Now their children are threatened by cerebral malaria - which is usually fatal.

As one of Colombia's last nomadic tribal peoples, the Nukak's future depends on their land being legally recognized and colonization halted. But the Colombian Government has not recognized 90% of their land, and taken no steps to protect the Nukak from hostile invasions.

The Nukak have had little non-Indian contact. What contact they have had has proved devastating. With a population of around 1100, the tribe cannot afford more losses.

In 1987 approximately 20 Nukak were attacked and killed by colonists in the north of their territory. The survivors of the massacre fled to the south, deep into the heart of their rainforest lands. At the same time, another group had been attacked by coca growers. The survivors of these two groups joined up and emerged out of the forest on the outskirts of the town of Calamar. However any Nukak who had lived in the area were killed off by colonists during the 1940's rubber boom. It seems that other Nukak had been shot at by the Colombian army from the air; they were mistaken for coca growers or left-wing guerillas. Meanwhile 20 Nukak children had been stolen by colonists to work as unpaid laborers.

The disoriented survivors of the 1987 massacre - mostly women and children - only spoke Nukak, so could not speak with the townspeople about the attacks. They were unused to life outside the rainforest and became depressed and sick. A missionary from the extremist US-based organization, New Tribes Mission (NTM), arrived, claiming to speak Nukak. It then emerged that NTM (whose activities amongst tribal people worldwide have done untold damage) had had a base in the north of the Nukak lands for at least 12 years.

The Colombian government's response to the Nukak's plight has been totally unacceptable. Despite protests, the government flew some of the Nukak back to the New Tribes Mission base. They were already infected with the flu virus after living in Calamar. The Nukak have no resistance to this new disease and no way of treating it. At least 109 Nukak have died as it has spread through their territory. They were returned from the NTM base to their forest homes with no medical care and no protection from further attacks. As well as the first cases of cerebral malaria in children living near the NTM base, cholera has also appeared in the region.

The Nukak traditionally live in the headwaters of the Infrida and Papunaua rivers and the southern basin of the River Guaviare.

The Nukak will only survive if their rights to all their lands are fully recognized and properly enforced. The Colombian government must also initiate a health project for the Nukak.

Please write courteous letters urging the Colombian government to title all of the Nukak's lands to them, an area of approximately 1 million hectares in Guaviare province. The government must ensure that there is no further colonization of Nukak lands. A properly funded health project must be initiated, to allow small medical teams to treat the Nukak before more of them die. Every effort must be made to recover those Nukak children who have been captured by colonists.

Source: Survival International

Please send your letters to:
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and to:
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