

# "We Need to Survive!"

## A Message from Davi Kopenawa Yanomami

*(Brazil) Davi Kopenawa Yanomami visited New York in April and met with the Secretary General of the United Nations, the Organization of American States, and the World Bank to explain the effects gold-miners are having on his people, the Yanomami of the state of Roraima in the Brazilian Amazon. He also met with many groups on the east coast to help raise funds for a Yanomami health project.*

*The following are excerpts from a statement made by Davi Kopenawa Yanomami to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights last September in Demini, Brazil.*

My name is Davi Kopenawa Yanomami... I am a Yanomami Indian. I want to send my message to those who are friends and who are helping us to defend the forest. I want to talk to the people who do not know the problems of the Indians in Brazil. We Yanomami Indians have lived in this forest for a very long time, for much longer than any White or non-Indian person. We used to be free and we did not have any kind of illness. We were not sick at all.

During that time there were no non-Indians around here. They were far away. We Indians did not know that the non-Indians would give us so many problems... I am talking about the gold miners who come here and take out our fish, the animals... and devastate the forest. That is what I am talking about... They have invaded our territory. They first came in 1987. They killed four Yanomami at Paapiu. From there they spread out into the territory with small airplanes and helicopters... and they

rolled into the forest. They are now all over the territory.

We Yanomami Indians are very worried because we do not have the authority of the President... we have to ask the government to change the situation and to take the gold miners... out of the area.

I have asked FUNAI (the Brazilian Bureau of Indian Affairs) many times and all the authorities, including former President Sarney, when he was President...to take out the gold miners... but the only thing they did was to promise and to keep promising things and not do anything.

Instead, they let many other gold-miners come in... and they did not take them out. Sickness also came with the gold miners. Because of the mosquitoes that bite them and then bite us, we are now having all of this sickness. The sickness called malaria is very strong, and I think at least 1000 Yanomami have died already. Even more than 1000. That is what I think.

Now our rivers.. our streams... are dirty. The Yanomami do not know about mercury...

Mercury is used by gold miners to clean the gold... It goes back to the river and the fish that the Yanomami eat and the water that the Yanomami drink is mixed with mercury. When they eat and drink that they get sick.

Those gold miners are also poor people. Like us, they are not rich. I feel pity for them because they come here, because their bosses send them here, and they just



*Davi Yanomami on his visit to North America.*

*Photo: Jane Wholley*

obey them. Around Surucucus, there are a lot of gold-miners. The federal police have not taken them out. They tried, but what they did was to get the nice gold-miners out, not the bad and mean ones.

I am a Yanomami Indian who understands the non-Indian world. I keep asking President Collor to expel the gold miners from our territory. President Collor has been to Surucucus, but... only to a military base... That is the only thing he saw. President Collor knows that the situation is not good. So I am asking other people to continue pressuring the Brazilian government to help expel the gold-miners.

I spoke to the United Nations, which gave me an award. I told them that the prize did not help my people. So I am asking the UN to help the Yanomami people to pressure the Brazilian government to remove the gold-miners from our area. Also, we want the Organization of American States... to help us as friends.

I don't think it is just the Brazilian government. You should pressure every government in the world because they are all alike, and they should help us... Protect the Indians, protect the rivers, the mountains, the forest. We need to survive.

It is very important for them too. It is not only the Yanomami but also the non-Indians. We all depend on the land. So if they do not protect the land, all of humanity will die.

To you whom I am sending this message, what I am asking is to do something to help the Brazilian Indians, and also all the Indians of the world, because the Indians want to live in peace. Not only the Indians who live in the forest, but also the Indians who live in the city and the non-Indians who are living in the city are suffering because the government should pay attention to all of us and do something to help us.

I am going to say something else... about the 19 islands of Yanomami land that former President Sarney demarcated. We Yanomami Indians do not want to live in islands. We want to be safe. The gold miners are going to enter our islands... We need a continuous area and a big area in order to be able to fish and hunt and live well. We want all of our land united.

In regards to the government operation that is supposed to take out the gold miners... they have not taken out all of the gold miners. The operation has stopped because the government says that they do not have money... I know the government authorities, the Brazilian authorities, and I know the politicians and I know the way they work. My feeling is that they do not want to take the gold miners out... What they really want is to be here and exploit our resources. That is why they do not want to solve our problems.

*(See Davi, p. 45)*

## Some Ground is Made in the Struggle for the Construction of a Yanomami Park

President Collor finally obeyed the Brazilian court decision and revoked former President Sarney's illegal decrees dividing Yanomami territory into 19 'islands' and create three illegal mining reserves. But optimism about a decision on a Yanomami Park soon diminished when Collor announced he was setting up a group to study Yanomami boundaries. On April 19, National Day of the Indian, he signed a decree calling for a proposal for the demarcation of the Yanomami territory to be presented to him within six months.

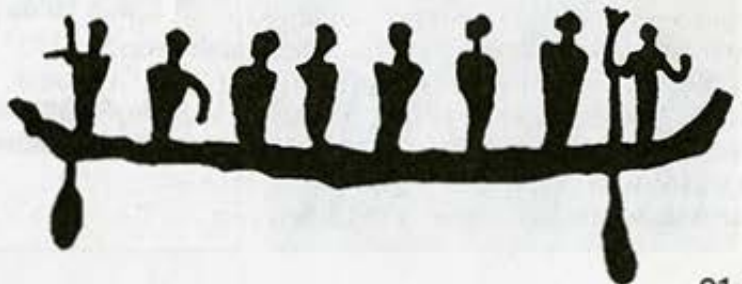
During President Collor's visit to the United States in June, environmental and Indian support groups informed him that the evacuation of the gold-miners in the Yanomami area had been paralyzed and the gold-miners had again invaded an extensive part of the Yanomami territory. Upon returning to Brazil, Collor fired FUNAI president Cantidio Guerreiro Guimaraes.

Meanwhile, the government planned to begin on July 19, the third operation to expel the gold-miners from the Yanomami territory using a sum of \$1.8 million. The government's plans for the gold-miners is being questioned. It was reported that the intention is to incorporate several thousand expelled gold-miners into agricultural projects. If the projects are set up near the Yanomami area, it is certain that they will re-invade the territory.

Sydney Possuelo, the new president of FUNAI published a resolution on July 22, 1991, calling for the demarcation of the Yanomami territory as a contiguous area of 9,419,108 hectares, located in the states of Roraima and Amazonas. This was signed by President Collor. The government is estimating that it will cost \$6 million to demarcate the territory.

### Last Minute News!!!

**On November 14, President Collor de Mello granted "permanent rights" over 36,358 square miles to the Yanomami!!!**





## Davi (continued from p. 21)

There are many people who are powerful. There are powerful gold miners... and authorities too, like Romero Juca, former president of FUNAI. He is responsible for letting the gold miners invade our territory and... for lots of killings of Yanomami... Something must be done to solve our problem because Romero Juca will not solve it. He does not like us...

Do the international authorities and people from the United States think it is true what they always say that the demarcation of Yanomami land is a matter of money, that they do not have money to do it?...

I am very worried about people abroad who... are giving money to Brazil... but not to help the Indians. This money that comes from abroad is helping the Brazilian government to oppress Indians. I am very worried about that.

Non-Indians are like ants. I know that non-Indians like our resources. They say that we have gold, we have lumber, and they say that they need that to help the people who live in the city. Well, we do not want them, and we do not want them here.

What we want is respect for our rights. We want them to leave us alone. We need help with regard to the health situation. In the beginning we did not need any help. We did not need any doctors, any medical doctors, any nurses or any medicine. But now we need doctors and nurses to help the Yanomami who are sick. We also need medicines because we used to cure ourselves only with 'shabori' [shamanism]... But that is not enough anymore. And we need medical doctors and medicines and help from non-Indian people.

We are worried because the non-Indians are not very much worried about us. They think that we are a different race. Therefore, they want to isolate us. They think we are bothering their work. We are preventing them from working here, so they would rather have us isolated. They do not worry very much about what is going on with us.

## Atencio (continued from p. 26)

They are a strong force in the economic survival of our communities. This is because of their involvement in the production of "molas," which is the art of the Kuna. Because the "molas" are being sold at national levels and exported to the US and Europe, they are achieving economic success at international levels. In many respects, the women have a greater capacity to organize themselves in cooperatives and to contribute to the economic survival of the Kuna family than the men do. This is why, when we speak of the Kuna economy, we speak of men and women as equals.

We have strongly safeguarded our spirituality and traditions. For example, we hold the *General Congress of Kuna Culture*, which unites the spiritual guides of all of our communities. They are highly respected by all Kuna people. They promote teaching and learning amongst the youth so that our rich traditions are not lost.

We, of Kuna Yala, are confronting serious problems along the Colombian border, where gold prospectors are invading our lands. We are also indirect victims of the confrontations which take place in Colombia between the guerrillas and the army. Violating all laws, both sides invade our region while the Panamanian authorities do nothing to stop them. The same thing occurs with the Yanqui (United States) army which often crosses our territory to go to the Panamanian border with the excuse of filling the vacuum created by the dissolution of the Panamanian army in 1989, following the invasion.



## Ampan (continued from p. 11)

domination, everybody is afraid that we will take a racist stand and that this will lead to a racial confrontation. For this reason, there has not been enough dialogue amongst the poor class. In meetings with laborers, peasants and intellectuals, it is important for us to talk so that we feel equal. We must, if we are from the same class, talk so that we can find a solution...

Plurinationality will only be possible with the total transformation of society. This is possible if, as in Switzerland, there are well-defined and recognized sectors. We understand that the problem is not exclusively indigenous. It is a problem which concerns all of us. In order to form such a state we must think carefully what it would be like. How would it be governed at the political, economic, social and cultural levels? If we find that the workers are on one side, the indigenous on another and other sectors on other sides, then it will not be possible... We must continually reconsider our struggle and include long-term goals in our strategy. We must work together and make compromises. We must coordinate our endeavors in this way or we will not succeed, even if we are united.