



Chief Itabira Surui at the National Congress in Brasilia.
photo: Aguirre/Switkes/Amazonia

Macuxi Tuchaua Luis: "White People Came Here Saying They Owned the Land"

"A large *fazendeiro* came here ten years ago and set up a ranch on our land. Forty of our people had built a corral to raise some animals—pigs, cattle, and chickens—but the *fazendeiro* set it on fire. We rebuilt the fence and again he set it on fire. Then he sent the police to take me to jail with all my people. I spent 27 days in jail.

Last June we cleaned an area to cultivate, but the *fazendeiro* forbid us from planting anything. He went to Boa Vista (the capital of Roraima) and made a "law" with the judge saying that we couldn't plant on our land; if we did plant, we would have to pay a 200 *cruzados* fine and would be sent to jail. But we will continue fighting—and will not give away our land, for we don't have anywhere else to go."

Violent Conflicts in Yanomani Area Continue

Last May 8th, a Yanomami child was killed and her father wounded when the Tiretheri village was attacked by a group of non-Indians. The suspects are a possibly organized group of gold miners attempting to get access to new mining fronts. Also, the burial of 20 Yanomami Indians was witnessed and reported by a miner coming from the Couto Magalhaes area. (See SAIIC urgent action bulletin 5/7/88).

Neither FUNAI, the National Indian Foundation, nor the government have taken any steps to ease the conflict between Indians and non-Indians in the area, and have denied that these conflicts take place. According to Father Saffirio of Roraima, the government's claims to have removed gold miners from the area are false. The number has in fact increased, he says, to over 25,000.

In the Brazilian Congress, several senators and deputies announced that "a genocide of immeasurable proportions has begun in the Yanomami territory, threatening the lives of 9,000 Indians," and that "urgent intervention" is needed. In a document, the Congressmen told Brazil's President José Sarney that the miners' invasion of the area is a demoralizing factor for the government. "We believe that it is not too late for the government to regain its authority and halt the genocidal process that would lead to extinction of the last isolated ethnic group of our country and the world."

There is much worry about the Yanomami situation among the professional teams that gave medical assistance to the area before they were expelled by the National Security Council as threats to the national sovereignty. They say now the Indians are completely without assistance and vulnerable to disease from contacts with the miners that have invaded the area.