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BRAZIL

THE YANOMAMI - Brief account of events 1974 - 1980. Their encounter with Brazilian National Society and its effects.

This statement is being made on behalf of 10.000 YANOMAMI indians who live in the extreme north of Brazil. The YANOMAMI are considered to represent the last and largest Indian Nation of the Americas still retaining their traditional patterns of culture.

In 1974 occurred the first massive invasion into YANOMAMI lands by road-builders sent into YANOMAMI lands to build Highway BR-210 (the Perimetral Norte highway). The effects were calamitous, in spreading of disease to which the indians were not immune, disruption of their traditional ways of living, prostitution and death. As a consequence of the building of the highway, in 1978, during a measles epidemic approximately 80 YANOMAMI died along the area of the upper Catrimani river valley. (The Yanomami in Brazil: 1979, ARC/IWGIA/SI Document)

In 1975/76 the existence of tin ore in the area of the Serra das Surucucus in the heart of Yanomami lands, provoked a rush of prospectors which disrupted the Yanomami way of life near mining sites and resulted in the invasion of their gardens, armed fighting and deaths. This situation led the Minister of the Interior to order that mining activities in the area be halted. (Diário Oficial, Portaria 422, 2.9.1976)

In 1978 FUNAI subdivided the Yanomami lands into 21 separate, minute lots, thus disrupting all possibility for this ethnic group to subsist culturally and economically as a people. (Portarias 477/N; 505/N; 512/N and 513/N)

Permits have been issued for prospecting in 1978 in the Serra de Surucucus region and in May 1980 in the Serra Couto de Magalhães. (FUNAI Authorization 064/78 and Alvarás Nrs. 2539 and 2540, 16.5.1980).

Pressures exercised by local politicians continue to reopen placer-miners activities. (O Estado de São Paulo, 7.12.1979. Multinational

It is known that for 12 (twelve) years different entities have repeatedly urged the Brazilian government authorities to create a Park for the YANOMAMI people. The Commission on Human Rights, United Nations Economic and Social Council in Geneva, in August 1979 has warned the Brazilian authorities that "unless (Brazilian) government plans were changed, it was expected that the largest surviving Amerindian tribe in South America, numbering some 17,000 people would cease to exist within 20 years". (17,000 Yanomami in both Brazil and Venezuela).

A report prepared by the Anti-Slavery Society for the Protection of Human Rights in September of 1980 related that "The proposal for an undivided park for the YANOMAMI has been discussed, shelved, promised and delayed, and now discussion of its future is to be shared by more government departments. This has, predictably, resulted in further prevarication and delay, even after the removal from FUNAI of its strongest expert advocates."

In August 1980 the Minister of the Interior of Brazil publically declared that a suitable land reserve will be created for the YANOMAMI by the end of this year. (Jornal do Brasil, 1.08.1980, TV Globo, 5.08.80).

In the first days of November of this year approximately 3,000 (three thousand) prospectors invaded the YANOMAMI region of Uraricaá searching for gold. The Brazilian press further reports the existence of 6,000 (six thousand) prospectors awaiting transport in Boa Vista, the capital of Roraima, to a mining site along the Coimin river. Sixty percent of the prospectors are infested by malaria. (Folha de São Paulo 8.11.80; TV globe new report 8.11.80; Folha de São Paulo 9.11.80).

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