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Reserve for Primitive Tribe Promised in 6 Months

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By JAMES BROOKE

CARACAS, Venezuela — In a breakthrough for the survival of the Yanomami Indians, Venezuela's President has promised to create a reserve in the Amazon for the threatened Stone Age tribe within six months.

"We will do it," Carlos Andrés Pérez promised in an interview at the Presidential Palace here last week. "We are going to give them special treatment because they are very important, one of the last ethnic reserves of humanity."

On Sept. 16, a survey commission returned from the area, reporting the discovery of 10 Yanomami villages they say had never before been visited by anyone except other tribal members. The Yanomami are believed to number about 14,000 in Venezuela and about 8,000 in Brazil, and most of their other villages had previously been visited by outsiders.

After meeting on Wednesday with the survey commission, Mr. Pérez requested that the leader, Charles Brewer-Carías, meet this week with Government advisers to start drawing up the boundaries and legal status for the reserve.

"He is very much in favor of the reserve," Mr. Brewer-Carías, a Venez-

uelan naturalist, said after briefing the President on Wednesday. "The dimensions and the legal status have yet to be decided."

A reserve would be an important step for the tribe, considered by anthropologists to be the last major tribe largely untouched by modern civilization in the Americas.

"Collective Sip of Relief"

"I am elated, very pleased," Napoleon A. Chagnon, an American anthropologist, said on hearing of Mr. Pérez's promise to create the Amazon's first Yanomami tribal reserve. "Because of the maltreatment of the Yanomami in the Brazilian side, there will be a collective sigh of relief around the world."

In Brazil, anthropologists and Government officials have debated the size of a Yanomami reserve for a decade. While the debate went on inconclusively, tens of thousands of gold miners invaded Indian lands, bringing malaria, scaring away hunting game and poisoning rivers with mercury.

"The Yanomami live worse in Brazil," Antonio Zazzara, a tribal leader, said last week in an interview at Ocaña, a Roman Catholic mission on the Orinoco River in the Amazonas Territory of Venezuela.

For centuries, Venezuela's attitude

toward the tribe in the remote southern corner of the nation was one of benign neglect, said Jesús Ignacio Cardoso, president of the Venezuelan Foundation for Anthropological Research. Reflecting a new interest, the foundation is to play host to a conference here Nov. 6 to 10 on the habits and culture of the Yanomami.

While some Venezuelans fear that they are about to witness a replay of the cultural and physical disintegration of Yanomami that started in Brazil in the late 1980's, the Government has sought to limit the miners' activities.

"On Saturday, the National Guard arrested 12 Colombians and seized their equipment, water pumps and two shotguns," Lieut. Toksen Hon of the Venezuelan Army said in an interview last week at the airport of Puerto Ayacucho, capital of Amazonas. An equal number of miners escaped into the jungle, said the officer, who took part in the raid, the second in two days of razing camps on the banks of the Orinoco.

In a typical case last June, when Venezuela's Defense Minister flew to a Yanomami area to inaugurate a new army base, his helicopter pilot spotted 12 Brazilian miners in Venezuela. The miners were arrested and expelled to Roraima Territory in Brazil.

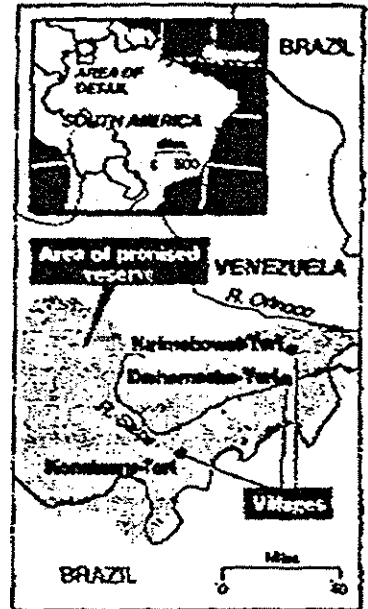
To keep Brazilian miners out of the area, Mr. Pérez and the President of Brazil, Fernando Collor de Mello, met on July 20 at a Venezuela border town facing Korabara. Out of the meeting came an agreement on joint cooperation on raids against miners and sharing of satellite photograph information about the sites of illegal jungle airstrips.

"We hear of 500 Brazilian miners here and 500 miners there," María Luisa Allías, Venezuela's Director of Indigenous Affairs, said in a recent interview as she studied a map of Amazonas in her office at the Education Ministry here.

In Brazil, the miners have caused a malaria epidemic by moving constantly through the rain forest and by using water-blasting mining techniques that create stagnant pools where mosquitoes breed. Now, malaria is spreading fast in Venezuela's Amazon.

"Malaria has worsened in the last two years among the Yanomami," Monica Perret, a Venezuelan doctor, said here. Recovering from a bout of malaria she picked up while attending the Indians, Ms. Perret said a study by a state health program, Parana-Cuabera, found that in Ocaña, as many as 50 percent of the Indians left it with malaria this year.

On a wall at the Amazon Ethnologi-



The New York Times

A reserve in Venezuela for the Yanomami tribe would shelter about 14,000 members. About 9,000 are believed to live in Brazil.

cal Museum in Puerto Ayacucho, a display lists the 37 Indian tribes that lived in Venezuela in 1492. Today only seven survive as distinct communities with more than 5,000 people.