



New Brazilian President Declares Reset with Indigenous People and Lands

OE Watch Commentary: It only takes a cursory look at the Brazilian press to see that President Bolsonaro has begun his term with controversy. Among his decrees and actions in his first week of office was to initiate significant changes regarding the governing of the indigenous peoples and their lands—largely those in the Amazon, but applying to all indigenous peoples and lands in Brazil. The National Indian Foundation (FUNAI), which since the 1970s has had responsibility for indigenous lands and people, will be stripped of that role according to President Bolsonaro. Instead, the Ministry of Agriculture will now have the job to oversee indigenous territories.

This was a shot across the bow for those dedicated to protecting the Amazon, the last great indigenous territory left in Brazil. The indigenous people themselves, NGOs, environmentalists, the UN and even the Catholic Church have publicly condemned the move as the accompanying excerpted articles demonstrate.

Historically and to greater or lesser degrees, the Amazon has been under assault from farmers, ranchers, loggers and many other sectors of the Brazilian economy. In fact, while the encroachment into indigenous land has at times slowed down, it has never stopped or reversed. The Amazon, and its native peoples, have continued to shrink since the first Europeans entered the territory hundreds of years ago. As industrialization and large scale agribusiness have proliferated in Brazil, more and more pressure to tap the Amazon of its resources pits indigenous people and their allies against powerful agribusiness interests and other elements of Brazilian society.

It was rubber in the late 19th and early 20th century. In fact, it was Brazilian rubber that helped the US war machine operate during World War II. Today, it is gold, timber, and exotic animals to name a few of the resources at stake in the Amazon; however, farming and ranching threaten vast tracks of otherwise protected land.

On 4 January 2019, the Missionary Indigenous Council (CIMI) published an open letter on *CNBB* condemning the “transfer to the Ministry of Agriculture, commanded by farmers who opposed the rights of the peoples, to carry out the identification, delimitation, demarcation and registration of areas required by indigenous peoples. In short, the government decreed...the annihilation of the rights guaranteed in Articles 231 and 232 of the Federal Constitution.” Indigenous leaders themselves were quick to respond to the presidential announcement and in one of many public letters, stated, according to the article from *Folha De. S.Paulo*, “Those who are not indigenous cannot suggest or dictate rules of how we should behave in our territory and in our country. We have the capacity and autonomy to speak for ourselves.”

The statement reveals another point of contention in Brazil regarding the native inhabitants of the Amazon. The remaining indigenous people of Brazil, and particularly of the Amazon, have held special territorial status via the 1988 post-military dictatorship constitution. So much so, some argue, that too much territory is being held hostage by so few. Indeed, estimates vary but all sources agree there are far less than a million native inhabitants occupying the Amazon. From that perspective, there will continue to be pressure to push into and exploit the vast region. President Bolsonaro just upped the ante. **End OE Watch Commentary (Billingsley)**



Upper Rio Negro near the Amazonian town of São Gabriel da Cachoeira in the Amazon.
Source: Dodge Billingsley.



Continued: New Brazilian President Declares Reset with Indigenous People and Lands

“...one signal that seeks to remind the world that Russia has interests in Venezuela...”

Source: “Em nota CIMI aponta medidas inconstitucionais do governo Bolsonaro que afronta direitos indigenas (In note CIMI points to unconstitutional measures of the Bolsonaro government that faces indigenous rights),” CNBB, 9 January 2019. http://www.cnbb.org.br/em-nota-cimi-aponta-medidas-inconstitucionais-do-governo-bolsonaro-que-afronta-direitos-indigenas/?fbclid=IwAR19I9O4Y0PMudnETUBM3gRRu9bUrmXWHvk-eORAH0_wflgsicPA1jYPF_o

The Missionary Indigenous Council (CIMI), an organization linked to the National Conference of Brazilian Bishops (CNBB), published a note on January 4 in which it repudiates measures intended to develop the country for purposes that disqualify individual and collectives of communities and traditional peoples, attacking leaders who fight for rights, threatening and criminalizing defenders of the environment, indigenists, entities and civil society organizations. Get to know, below, the entire document...

...“transfer to the Ministry of Agriculture, commanded by farmers who opposed the rights of the peoples, to carry out the identification, delimitation, demarcation and registration of areas required by indigenous peoples. In short, the government decreed...the annihilation of the rights guaranteed in Articles 231 and 232 of the Federal Constitution...”

Source: “Em carta a Bolsonaro, lideranças indígenas pedem diálogo e criticam medidas (In a letter to Bolsonaro, indigenous leaders ask for dialogue and criticize measures),” Folha De S.Paulo, 4 January 2019. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2019/01/em-carta-a-bolsonaro-liderancas-indigenas-pedem-dialogo-e-criticam-medidas.shtml>

“Those who are not indigenous cannot suggest or dictate rules of how we should behave or act in our territory and in our country.” We have the capacity and autonomy to speak for ourselves,” write indigenous leaders in a letter to President Jair Bolsonaro.

...It is a reference to Bolsonaro’s speech that the Indians should not live in isolation, as if they were in a zoo. However, revising the policy of non-contact adopted by FUNAI today worries indigenous experts “We do not accept integration policy anymore, we do not want to be decimated by new government actions...We want to continue being indigenous, with right to our ethnic identity, just as we are Brazilian.”...



Yanomani woman in Maturaca near the Venezuela border region of the Amazon.
Source: Dodge Billingsley.