

Illegal mining, malaria and government neglect threaten the existence of the Yanomami people

Manaus, November 24, 2021

From the Human Rights Nucleus of REPAM and with the impulse and support of the Indigenous Missionary Council of Brazil (CIMI), an intense work of international advocacy with the United Nations and the OAS has been started last days, given the unsustainable situation of violation of the human rights of the Yanomami people in Brazil.

Genocide's risk

The Yanomami and Ye'kwana indigenous peoples, inhabitants of the Yanomami Indigenous Land, are experiencing a dramatic situation that seriously threatens their physical survival as a people and their cultural continuity, due to the invasion of their territory by illegal mining and abandonment, systematic omission and negligence of the competent public body responsible for the health of indigenous peoples, the Special Secretariat for Indigenous Health - SESAI and the Special District for Indigenous Health Yanomami and Ye'kwana.

The Yanomami Indigenous Land (YIL) is located on the border between Brazil and Venezuela, in the states of Roraima and Amazonas. It was demarcated and regularized in 1992 with a total size of 9.6 million hectares. It is traditionally inhabited by the Yanomami and Ye'kwana indigenous peoples with a current population of 28,141 people, according to official SESAI data. During the 30 years following the regularization of their territory, the constant threat of the presence of the illegal mining, together with the difficulties in primary health care always challenged the lives of the Yanomami and of the Ye' kwana - particularly since the creation of the SESAI- . These two problems have taken on extraordinary and dramatic dimensions again in recent years.

Four years ago the presence of the State has been increasingly weak in the territory, there is no infrastructure for the provision of health services, neither professionals or medicines. The river, the animals and the land are infected by the heavy metals that they use in the illegal mining, such as mercury, even scientific research pointed out that 92% of the Yanomami are exposed to contamination.

Inspection and protection posts for the territory, which is also inhabited by groups in voluntary isolation, were deactivated a few years ago and did not function again or some posts did so only in a precarious way, even with a court order determining the immediate reactivation of all; which has increased deforestation and illegal logging. The food security of these communities is threatened by having their territory invaded and their natural resources looted, child malnutrition continues to increase and with a brutal reality: in the period from 2019 to 2020, 24 children have died.

The international human rights system must should respond:

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has been following the situation of the Yanomami people for many months. As we have seen, it has granted precautionary measures that have not been accepted by the Government. The consideration that international

covenants, both regional and universal, are being violated are evident. Hence, we have come with the urgent account of the latest events to the mechanisms of the United Nations and the Organization of American States to urge that the necessary pressure measures be carried out so that the paralysis of the flagrant violations reported begins.

The UN Mechanism of Experts, the UN Rapporteur for Indigenous Peoples, the UN High Commissioner of Human Rights, the Permanent Forum for Indigenous Issues of the United Nations and, on the other hand, the Commission, Executive Secretariat and the Rapporteurship for indigenous peoples of the Inter-American system have, all of them, the current information of the inhuman and brutal reality of this town.

A response is urgent and necessary.

Cardinal Barreto: The clamor of the Yanomami people asks that as the Church we raise our voices for those who suffer

On the other hand, and during the presentation of the beginning of the 1st Ecclesial Assembly for Latin America and the Caribbean in Mexico, Cardinal Barreto, president of REPAM, has indicated that “the clamor of the Yanomami people asks that as the Church we raise the voice for those who suffer”, for the situation of its entire population, especially its children, totally abandoned. “And faced with this, the Church not only has to raise its voice, but also express the pain and suffering that arises as a cry from the Amazon.

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