

The Yanomami Massacres and the Role Of A Powerful Anti-Native Alliance

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Amanaka' a Amazon Network

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THE ROLE OF A POWERFUL
ANTI-NATIVE ALLIANCE**

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I die the longest death,
the shocking death
of a Continent
-- Hamilton Pereira

Last month's widely reported massacre of Yanomami Indians by Brazilian gold miners in the northern Amazon village of Haximu was not an isolated event. Recently uncovered evidence reveals that the tragedy was just one in a series of three massacres of the Yanomami people.

Nor is the conflict limited to the Yanomami and the gold miners. Rather, it is merely the focal point of an escalating post-cold war battle over the destiny of the Amazon Rainforest and its peoples.

In this report, we draw from new information sources, to determine, to the limits of our knowledge, what actually occurred before, during and after the massacres.

We show that the gold miners are not acting alone. Rather, they are merely the spearhead of a concerted effort by an informal, but powerful, anti-native alliance, made up of local politicians, business interests and military leaders.

Most important, we show that the massacres are just one aspect of a concerted strategy by this alliance -- to dismantle the Yanomami Reserve, annihilate the native populations and gain complete control over their gold-rich territory.

Where and How Many -- Two Bogus Issues

Conflicting reports by Brazilian officials have focused attention on the number of Yanomami massacred. First, the President of FUNAI, the Brazilian Foundation for the Indian, said it was 16. Then he changed the number to 73, and later to 119. Now, as he leaves office, fired by President Itamar Franco, he swears it was no more than 19.

The Brazilian authorities also seem to be preoccupied with the precise location of the village of Haximu. First they said that it was in Brazil. Now, in a thinly veiled attempt to wash their hands of responsibility, they have focused attention on the fact that it's probably in Venezuela.

But the exact number of people killed and the precise location of the village are bogus issues.

The FUNAI and Federal Police know all too well that, due to the limitations of the Yanomami numerical vocabulary and due to the Yanomami tradition of cremating the dead, no one will ever know for sure how many individuals were massacred.

They also know that, with only 70 km of Brazil's 1,558 km border with Venezuela clearly defined, it has never been officially decided whether the region surrounding Haximu is in Brazil or in Venezuela. (See map.)

Their focus on these issues is a deliberate attempt to divert attention to what really happened and why.

Three Massacres

In order to piece together the most probable chain of events, we draw from two reputable sources.

The first is French anthropologist Bruce Albert and physician Claudio Oliveira. Albert, who has been working with the Yanomami for 25 years, interviewed extensively a group of 69 Yanomami that fled from the massacres and arrived at the Makos medical post run by the Commission for the Creation of Yanomami Park (CCPY). And Oliveira, CCPY doctor at the post, examined each of the survivors. ¹

The second source is the chief Yanomami spokesman, Davi Kopenawa. He was authorized to bring six of his warriors, chosen for their tracking skills, to help police and FUNAI officials in the search for human remains in the wake of the massacre. Davi is

¹ The Commission for the Creation of the Yanomami Reserve (CCPY), which runs the medical post, has its headquarters in Sao Paulo. Founded in 1974, it was -- and is -- the world's first Yanomami protection organization. Its founder and present coordinator, Claudia Andujar, publishes a regular monthly update on the Yanomami, available in the United States through Amanaka'a. Extensive evidence gathered by CCPY confirms that there were at least three massacres; and that these were not isolated events.



Although Brazilian authorities now say that the village of Haximu is located on Venezuelan territory, the working description of the border is vague, based on an equally vague description of where Amazon River waters end and where the Orinoco River waters begin. Moreover, these borders will remain ill-defined until a ruling is handed down by the Binational Commission for Border Demarcation. And according to a Venezuelan spokesman, the decision regarding Haximu is still pending.

Regardless of the Commission's decision, the village of Homoxi, the site of the first documented massacre, is clearly on Brazilian territory. Furthermore, all the gold miners who have invaded the region are from Brazil.

And regardless of the decision, the Yanomami have no interest in disputing the exact location of Haximu. In fact, Yanomami chief Davi Kopenawa was the first to point out that Haximu is probably on Venezuelan territory -- a comment ignored by the authorities in their first official announcement of the massacre.

The Yanomami's most immediate concern is to find and punish the culprits in order to send a clear signal to the gold miners that further violence will not be tolerated -- on either side of the border.

the recipient of the U.N. Global 500 prize and is widely respected by American leaders. These include Interior Secretary Bruce Babitt, with whom he visited in Washington under the sponsorship of Amanaka'a in early May, and Vice President Al Gore, with whom he met at the Earth Summit last year in Rio de Janeiro.

Although the details -- such as the exact number of individuals, the exact dates and the precise location -- may never be determined with accuracy, we can now confirm the following chronology of events:

First massacre: Sometime in late July. Gold miners, illegally prospecting within Yanomami territory in the region of Homoxi-Xideia, attacked 6 Yanomami Indians belonging to the subgroup Bokarahutemtheri, killing five. The sixth, although wounded, managed to escape. But because there are no words for numerals above the number two in Yanomami language, the death toll was estimated according to survivor descriptions of the attack. Some of the survivors apparently fled to the village of Haximu.

This first massacre was denounced by Davi Kopenawa Yanomami; and his statement was later published by CCPY in its Update #69, released August 17, 1993. CCPY also reports other conflicts between Yanomami Indians and gold miners on the upper reaches of the neighboring Mucajai River.

But these events were ignored by the Brazilian and international press.

Yanomami response. The Yanomami responded by killing two gold miners in two separate confrontations. This response was more than just an act of revenge. According to CCPY, it was a natural consequence of the stepped-up illegal penetration by gold miners in the northern reaches of the Yanomami Reserve, where Indian populations have had little or no previous contact. And according to Davi Yanomami, it was a natural reaction to the construction of a clandestine airstrip on the upper reaches of the Toototobi River, through which Davi believes new supplies and new waves of gold miners are now entering the region.

Second massacre. Members of the Haximu community, as well a survivors of the first massacre, gathered fruit at an old garden plot on the lower reaches of the Haximu River. They set up a temporary encampment. Suddenly, they were surrounded by armed gold miners. The gold miners shot three women and a man to death.

They attacked and killed three teenage girls and six children. They cut down their bodies with machetes, decapitating the children and beating an old woman to death.

This massacre, originally thought to have occurred at their village, now appears to have actually taken place miles away, at their temporary encampment. This is documented by the interviews with survivors conducted by Albert soon after their arrival in Makos. And it is confirmed by Davi Kopenawa who was able to locate ten cremation sites with human remains such as bones and teeth, many of which bear bullet marks.

Third massacre. The survivors of the second massacre did not return to the their two communal huts or *malocas*. Instead they fled south. But separately, the *malocas* were burned to the ground. Although the remains of only one individual has been found so far, more deaths are suspected in the burning, since it is customary for the very elderly and the very young to stay behind during hunting and gathering expeditions.

Flight to Makos. 69 survivors of the second massacre near Haximu wandered through the forest for up to a month. They fled towards the headwaters of the Orinoco River, which runs into Venezuelan territory. And they finally arrived in Makos.

The flight of these 69 individuals is what apparently caused the FUNAI's confusion regarding the actual number killed. When no one found them, they were thought to be dead. And FUNAI officials, reluctant to go into the jungle to investigate personally, didn't bother to confirm.

When they finally showed up at Makos, they were interviewed by anthropologist Albert and examined by Physician Oliveira. Oliveira reports that four individuals -- including two girls ages six and seven -- had bullet wounds. Furthermore, Davi Kopenawa and his team of trackers verified that there was a series of cremation sites on the way from the massacre site at Haximu to Makos.

Thus, the findings of Albert, Oliveira and Kopenawa demonstrate that:

1. There was not one, but rather a series of massacres and murderous attacks by Brazilian gold miners on the Yanomami Indians -- both before and after the widely reported Haximu massacre.

2. The gold miners pursued the Indians over a period of days and weeks in an apparent attempt to hunt down and kill the survivors.

3. The gold miners were numerous, well organized and had a clearcut mission.

In short, the massacre reported in the worldwide press was not an isolated event. It was part of a concerted effort to brutalize the Yanomami, which, in turn, is the direct culmination of a long series of violent acts against the Brazilian native peoples.

In 1963, Brazil was shaken by the massacre of the Cinta-Larga Indians, at parallel 11. Then there were the Temb e slaughtered in the Par a-Maranh o region and the Arara who were mowed down in the path of the Transamazon Highway, just to mention a few.

In each and every case, by sheer virtue of their silence and inaction, the authorities have encouraged more murders, more assassinations and more massacres. Amnesty International has found that no trials have ever resulted from the current 16 police investigations of killings of Yanomami people over the last few years.

The same is true for other native peoples. And when there was a trial, it was to absolve -- not to convict. Example: The murderer of Guarani leader Marcal de Souza Tupay, in Mato Grosso do Sul, who was captured, found "innocent" and allowed to go scott free.

Will things be any different this time? We hope so; but we must expect the worst.

If not stopped, the most recent massacres could be just the beginning of a new, more bloody, phase in the annihilation of native populations in Brazil.

Who's To Blame?

Brazilian federal police have reported a confession by Pedro Alcantara Garcia, a gold prospector under custody in Boa Vista, the capital of Roraima.

Garcia's confession appears to corroborate our conclusions that there was more than one massacre. He says they killed and

buried four Indians on one occasion; returned days later to kill still another; and then, 24 hours later, went back for a third time to their village, finding them instead in the forest, where they killed still another twelve Indians. Garcia also confirms that the killings were ordered by a gold mining entrepreneur, Joao Neto.

In addition, the Brazilian investigators say they have the names of 20 gold miners implicated in the massacre but don't know their whereabouts.

These individuals may be the ones who are directly responsible for the tragedy. But indirectly, the Brazilian Government is guilty, by virtue of its neglect. Local politicians are guilty for encouraging the illegal invasions of up to 40,000 gold miners on Yanomami lands since 1988, bringing disease and death to the Indians they contacted.² And military leaders are guilty of sacrificing the Yanomami for the sake of exaggerated national security concerns.

Human rights advocate and poet Hamilton Pereira, (Pedro Tierra) in his article, "The Genocide of the Yanomami," explains why the Yanomami died in Homoxi and Haximu:

"[This massacre just shows] one more act of continuous tragedy which has dragged on for 500 years -- a tragedy that no longer manages to move Brazilian society and has not led to effective federal policies to protect indigenous communities.

"The disordered invasion of indigenous areas masks the perverse logic presiding over the country's frontier expansion process. The conservative modernization of Brazilian agriculture produced high land concentrations, accelerated the exodus to the large cities -- about 32 million in less than 30 years -- shifting important contingents of farmers from all regions to the Amazon.

² FUNAI officials estimate that the total number of gold miners that have entered the region since 1988 is close to 30,000; while Brazil's largest newspaper, *Folha de Sao Paulo* puts the figure at 40,000. In 1991, thousands of miners were removed; and since then many have returned. Today, in the Northern reaches of the Yanomami Reserve, officials estimate that there are anywhere from 600 - 2000 gold miners, with no estimates available for the entire Yanomami Reserve. The recent massacres would never have occurred if the authorities had only enforced the law which clearly prohibits the presence of these gold miners in the Yanomami Reserve.

"This wave of migration had a severe impact upon indigenous populations. In a country where the memory of the oppressed was stolen by the same exploiters of their resources, few remember the silent death of the Nhambiquara during the paving of the 'alignment correction' of BR-364 into their area, in Rondonia. It has led to the devastation of the forest to sell wood, the occupation of vast stretches of land for cattle ranching, and turning over the subsoil in search of minerals."

"When someone decides one day to stop and tell the history of indigenous populations in Brazil in this last quarter of the 20th century, it will all be summed up with the three tools of genocide: the motor-saw, the cattle hoof and the mercury. They are the tools of rugged men -- prospectors, squatters, adventurers in search of opportunities -- carrying out the interests of large landowners, lumber and mining companies."

Indeed, contrary to the latest government declarations, most of the gold miners do not come to the Yanomami area on their own. They are brought in by small airplanes which belong to mining entrepreneurs and they use over 100 clandestine airstrips built in the region.

Officials in high places further encourage the brutality by making widely-publicized racist statements which depict the native peoples as "subhuman." For example, General Euclides Figueiredo, representing a hardline faction of the military, argued that the Yanomami have no legal right to their traditional territory because, "they are devoid of any intelligence, wandering around naked and breeding like animals."

Thus, on that infamous day when the gold miners shot, decapitated and mutilated the men, women and children of Haximu, they were not acting alone in some random, unplanned escapade. They had the tacit support of powerful segments of their society.

An Anti-Native Alliance

The official denials merely underscore a more meaningful fact of life: Three key groups -- the local right wing politicians, military officers and business interests -- form a powerful anti-native alliance:

1. The local right wing politicians -- led by Roraima Governor Ottomar Pinto -- have always been opposed to the

creation of the Yanomami Reserve, insisting that mining companies should be allowed to operate within the legal boundaries of the Yanomami territory.

2. Key elements in Brazil's military have long viewed the native populations as a threat to national security. Furthermore, they consider the Brazilian environmental, indigenous and human rights organizations -- along with their international allies -- the worst enemies of the Brazilian people in the post-cold war era. They even made some feeble attempts to blame these "enemies" for the recent tragedies. And back in 1991, during the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, they denounced alleged U.S. designs to exploit the mineral wealth in northern Brazilian territory, mostly in the Amazon Rainforest.

3. The gold mining, loggers, ranchers and other business interests have the most to gain from the conflict. They make up a strong lobby, which provides the critical financial and logistic support to both the local politicians and the military leaders. This lobby is pressing forward with plans to exploit the rainforest regardless of the consequences.

Other than the entrepreneur who ordered them, there is no concrete evidence that the anti-native groups were directly behind the recent massacres of the Yanomami. However, there is abundant evidence that they are exploiting the massacres to gain the upper hand in the region. Before the massacres, their public statements created an atmosphere of impunity. And after the massacres, they have used the uncertainty about the number killed to openly discredit the defenders of the Yanomami. Plus, they are depicting the legitimate native custom of cremation as an example of "savagery." But this anti-native publicity campaign is just a small part of a much broader plan.

**Anti-native groups now plan
to roll back Indian rights and
continue the destruction of the rainforest**

The 1988 Constitution mandates the demarcation of all native lands by October 5th of this year. With just a few weeks left, they're clearly not going to make the deadline. They're not

even close.³

Instead, the anti-native groups are seeking to severely reduce any protections for indigenous populations in the upcoming constitutional revision this year. Their stated intent is not only to cut down the demarcation of native lands, but to roll back the scant progress that has been made so far.

Anthropologist Terence Turner documents this plan in his call-for-action letter of August 30. In it, he analyzes a policy paper released by the Superior War College, which says "the new mission of the armed forces must be to repel [the] foreign-backed obstacles to national economic development."

The policy paper also states that the mandate of the 1988 constitution -- to recognize, demarcate and defend all traditional indigenous territories -- be largely overruled by development and national security interests. Because their large reserve is mostly located on border regions, the Yanomami are singled out as posing an intolerable threat to security.

There are others in Brasilia, of course, who oppose these changes to the Constitution. However ...

**If their strategy against native rights fails,
the anti-native groups have a contingency plan:
A military takeover of the region.**

Whenever the army gains control over an area, the Indian

³ The government recognizes 519 indigenous areas, of which only 238 have been demarcated, 197 are incomplete, and 84 have yet to be even touched.

One reason for the slow progress has been the fierce opposition. For example, in the state of Roraima, authorities have threatened armed conflict if the Federal Government maintains the Yanomami Reserve and establishes another reservation at the Raposa do Sol area for the Macuxi and Wapixuna Indians.

Late last month, with the Yanomami crisis still unresolved, these two native groups blockaded the road into their area, and took two miners hostages to press for federal demarcation of their traditional lands. In reprisal, miners and cattle ranchers took five Indians hostage; and when these were released by the police, gold miner groups threatened to lynch the Indians on the spot.

Roraima's Planning Secretary Haroldo Amoras is reported to have said that, if the Brazilian government decides to demarcate the Raposa do Sol area, "there is really going to be an armed conflict in the area." According to Amoras, there are 340 cattle ranches within the area set aside for the Macuxi-Wapixuna, and these people will not leave. Politicians, cattle and mining entrepreneurs falsely claim that Roraima would "lose" 53 percent of its territory to its indigenous population, encompassing 15 percent of the state's population. In retaliation, they are literally threatening war.

However, these conflicts are not caused by the demarcation process. Rather they are caused by mixed messages given by the authorities, and lack of consistency or political will to enforce the law. Once policies, procedures and boundaries are clearly established and implemented, conflicts and massacres will be far less likely.

Reserve is redefined as a military zone. The army then gains the authority to bypass the constitution and grant economic licenses to exploit native lands. So even if the anti-native groups lose in their bid to revise the constitution in October, this loophole would provide them with an alternate attack route.

With this in mind, the wife of Roraima Governor Pinto, Senator Marluce Pinto, is now trying to exploit the recent massacre against the Yanomami to help force a much stronger presence of the military in the region.

Her apparent strategy: Form a Congressional Investigation Commission to delve into the massacres. Prove that the Yanomami are incapable of defending themselves. Use this as the pretext for the military to take control. And then take full advantage of the military's power to grant economic licenses, opening the floodgates for gold mining and other business interests to invade the region.

U.S. Military Maneuvers Across The Border

Adding still further to the impetus for Brazilian military strategies and operations in the region are the U.S. military maneuvers on the other side of the border. The timing couldn't be worse. And the potential consequences couldn't be more unfortunate. It gives military opponents one more powerful excuse to undo the Yanomami Reserve.

The U.S. carried out joint military maneuvers with the Guyanese Army in May; and has scheduled similar operations with the Surinam Army in September, in dense forest areas near the Brazilian border.⁴

⁴ The latest flurry of accusations seem to have been touched off by an incident last May with a Brazilian journalist during the Guyana exercises. The reporter, who was in Guyana at the time, tried to visit the site of operations but was allegedly barred and harassed by the U.S. military. He reported that the soldiers fired warning shots at him, captured him and took his film.

The U.S. Embassy in Brasilia and the State Department's Brazil Desk in Washington have made efforts to cool these fears. They are rigorously enforcing their rule of prior notification to the Brazilian government about each exercise. They've issued press releases. And they even placed an op-ed authored by Ambassador Melton in a major paper. Normally, these efforts would be more than enough to calm the fears of the Brazilian military, but they didn't. Therefore, it appears that many in the Brazilian military have a hidden agenda: To find another pretext for more direct control over the Yanomami region.

According to Dr. Barbara Bramble of the National Wildlife Federation, this has resulted in "a renewed flurry of accusations by the Brazilian military leadership that the United States -- either on its own or in cahoots with other nations -- is intent on 'internationalizing the Amazon.'"

**Another Bogus Issue:
An Independent Yanomami "Nation State"**

Military opponents to the creation of the 9.4 million hectare Yanomami Reserve have even tried to relate the Yanomami to a foreign plot. They argue that the demarcation of the Yanomami land on the Brazilian side would allow the Yanomami Indians to join with their kin in Venezuela and declare their "self-determination." They make it appear as though this is tantamount to the declaration of an independent nation.

In this scenario, the Yanomami would then be induced to allow U.S. mineral companies to enter the region, letting them gain control over a vast area of Brazilian territory, without even firing a shot.

But in its zeal to make its point, the military leaders have overlooked the obvious: The autonomy of native reservations is invariably secondary to the autonomy of sovereign countries. They never have been -- and never will be -- independent states. And to imply that the native populations are a threat to a modern nation borders on the absurd. Indeed, the very concept of a nation-state is totally foreign to the Yanomami.

In any event, the military is moving forward with concrete plans to strengthen its control of the region through highways, satellite monitoring systems, military outposts and other infrastructure.

The big danger: These military operations could be the first steps toward activating the Calha Norte Project.

The Calha Norte Project

The Calha Norte (northern wedge) Project, designed in 1985, embodies an old military dream to control all lands to the north of the Amazon River.

The project would be developed and managed by the Army. It would foster the migration of southern settlers to the area to

"protect the unguarded borders of northern Brazil." And it would "defend Brazil from any eventual invasions and undesirable occupation by alien economic and social forces."

But, as a direct consequence, it would also result in the utter destruction of the Yanomami Reserve.

In a recent update (#68 of 6/12/93), CCPY puts the project in a new perspective: With the end of the cold war and the appearance of new alliances in the Southern Hemisphere, Calha Norte would help define a new role for the military in Brazil. Rather than defending the nation against tangible threats to Brazilian sovereignty, they would use the project to smash the goals of environmentalists, and block what they call "the internationalization of the Amazon."

Already, military maneuvers are taking place in the states of Rondonia, Acre and Amazonas. And these maneuvers have become a threat to the well-being of the Yanomami, according to CCPY. Although all military plans for the Amazon are secret, it appears that new operations are being planned for September at the army base of Surucucus in Roraima, located within Yanomami territory.

The Brazilian Constitution grants the military the right to perform these operations and build its bases within indigenous areas. But it does not allow economic activities without special permits. Unfortunately, most decision-makers in the military don't accept this distinction. They have made it quite clear that they want to undo the Yanomami Reserve. And they are also quite willing to promote economic activities on indigenous lands.

The anti-native groups are winning so far.

In sum, the recent massacres are just one episode in a rising tide of destruction. By exploiting the massacre to achieve their political goals, and by moving forward with their development plans, the anti-native alliance is achieving its goals, with increasing speed and momentum.

Anthropologist Terence Turner puts it this way:

"The slaughter of the Yanomami [was] the direct result of local politicians' and business interests' encouragement of the invasion of the Yanomami reserve by miners, in defiance of the Brazilian law and the Federal government. The Governor of the Brazilian state

of Roraima had declared [many times] that he will not recognize the boundaries of the Yanomami reserve. He encouraged illegal invasions of the area by gold miners, in defiance of half-hearted efforts by Federal Police agents to remove them.

"The invasions, however, have, from the start, had strong tacit support from within the Federal government itself. High government officials have been calling, with increasing boldness, for a revocation of Indian legal rights and reserves, and an opening of indigenous lands to unrestrained exploitation by miners, loggers and ranchers. The Brazilian print and broadcast media [networks] have lent themselves with enthusiasm to the crescendo of anti-indigenous voices, which lately has swelled into a nationwide campaign to repeal indigenous constitutional rights and territorial reserves at the forthcoming constitutional convention."

Conclusion: The anti-native groups are strong and getting stronger. Most disturbing of all, unless the Yanomami and their friends can mount an equally strong alliance, there's a good chance the anti-native forces will win in a new, frontal attack on the rainforest and its peoples.

**While the world reacts with shock,
gold miners continue to enjoy official support.**

Despite the deep outrage of the international community, and the temporary uproar in the world press, the belief among the gold miners and their supporters -- that they can kill the "subhuman indians" with virtual impunity -- remains unchallenged.

If this is true, even in the midst of widespread international pressure, what will happen when the Yanomami massacres become "old news" and the outrage dies down?

Already, the gold miners see how the Brazilian authorities are passing the buck to the Venezuelans. Then they see how Venezuelan authorities, with no jurisdiction over the thousands of Brazilian gold miners invading from the South, are passing the buck right back to the Brazilians.

The gold miners know they have the support of prominent politicians and powerful military leaders. They know that the probability of being caught for their crimes is small; and the probability of being punished, even smaller. They are getting the

message that they can plow ahead, with impunity and without remorse, in this campaign of genocide against the Yanomami.

The Yanomami and other native populations, meanwhile, are getting the message that all the promises ever made by the government -- and all the rights afforded to them by law -- are next to meaningless; that they have no more protection against invading gold miners than trees against a chain saw.

**The international community
mobilizes to defend the Yanomami.
But it's hardly enough.**

Following the Homoxi massacre, there was no international response. If there had been, maybe the second massacre could have been prevented.

But very few people knew about Homoxi. And by the time the news did come out, the second and more devastating massacre at Haximu had already taken place.

In contrast, the shock of the Haximu massacre has resulted in widespread protests and vigils in Brazil, the U.S. and Europe:

- * The coverage by the Brazilian news media was extensive. On August 19, for example, the country's largest newspaper, the *Folha de São Paulo*, published a special six-page section on the Yanomami. And all major newspapers and magazines followed the story consecutively for the next two weeks.
- * Major U.S. media such as the *New York Times* and the wire services also picked up the story, making millions of Americans aware of the plight of the Yanomami for the first time.
- * On August 27, United Nations Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali issued a statement extending his "heartfelt condolences to the Yanomami people," and saying that "this tragic event, which took place during the International Year of World's Indigenous People, puts in relief the plight of indigenous peoples around the world." According to Elsa Stamatapoulou of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights, this is the first time that the Secretary-General has expressed his

condolences directly to any people.⁵

- * Simultaneously, the atrocity was also condemned in Geneva at a meeting of the U.N. Subcommission on Human Rights.
- * On August 18, Amanaka'a contacted the Congressional Human Rights Caucus of U.S. House of Representatives. And on August 19, we received a copy of the Caucus' letter to President Itamar Franco, signed by the Caucus co-chairmen Congressmen John Porter and Tom Lantos. In the letter, the Congressmen expressed their "grave concern and sorrow over the murder of the Yanomami Indians." They also voiced their concern over the influx of illegal gold prospectors in the Yanomami territory, which is "accompanied by deforestation, contamination of waterways, an increase in disease among the Yanomami, and growing tensions between the Yanomami and miners."
- * On August 19, Amanaka'a contacted the office of Nobel Peace Prize Winner Rigoberta Menchu, a native Guatemalan and Goodwill Ambassador to the U.N. Year of the Indigenous Peoples. In response, she issued a communiqué on August 23, expressing her concern with the massacre of the Yanomami by "individuals who value minerals above human lives, and act freely in the Amazon." Menchu called on the United Nations to send a mission to the area to investigate the massacre as part of its responsibility to the welfare of indigenous peoples, "especially in this current United Nations International World Year of Indigenous People."
- * Declarations of concern and statements of solidarity with the Yanomami people poured into the offices of Amanaka'a in New York and CCPY in Sao Paulo from scores of individuals, non-governmental and institutional organizations. Plus, Amanaka'a has received copies of countless letters of protest sent to President Franco

⁵ The U.N. Secretary General's statement of condolences coincided with a visit by Amanaka'a to the U.N. to deliver a letter from Davi Kopenawa Yanomami to Mr. Boutros-Ghali and appear at a U.N.-sponsored press conference on the massacre. Amanaka'a directors Zezé Weiss and Christine Halvorson were accompanied by anthropologist and Yanomami specialist Dr. Gale Gomez, who was in the Yanomami village of Demini during the events, and by human rights advocate Bianca Jagger, who spoke on behalf of the international community. In their presentation, they made it clear that the recent tragedies were not an isolated event.

along with letters of condolences to Davi Kopenawa and his people from all around the world.

- * A letter from the Western Canada Wilderness Committee, signed by director Richard McDermott on behalf of its 20,000 members, protests the massacre and calls for the immediate expelling of all gold miners from the Yanomami territory.
- * From the indigenous people of Assynt in Scotland, we received a letter to Davi Yanomami in which they state they are aware of the plight of the Yanomami people and have registered protests with the Brazilian Embassy in London. "You should know that many people around the world are aware of your problems and will bring whatever pressure we can to bear on those responsible," they wrote.

In sum, demonstrations and letters of protest organized by Amanaka'a and other groups enjoyed widespread support and were successful beyond our best expectations.

"A Minister Without A Ministry"

This international pressure finally helped to elicit some official responses from Brasilia. President Itamar Franco called an extraordinary meeting of Brazil's National Defense Council to discuss and approve the creation of an Extraordinary Ministry for the Amazon, and a special Federal Police office at the Surucucus military base, which is located within the boundaries of the Yanomami territory.

That evening, major media networks in Brazil announced that the new Minister for the Amazon was Ambassador Rubens Ricupero, until then the Brazilian Ambassador to the United States. He will act as an ombudsman for the Amazon region. But is this enough?

In the past, Brasilia has frequently given lip-service to the idea of protecting native populations. And sometimes, in response to international pressure, this or that symbolic gesture is offered. But little of substance is done. And behind the symbolism, old hatreds continue to ferment; while new battles over strategic resources build momentum.

The newly created "Ministry of The Amazon" is a case in point. Well-respected members of Brazil's Congress have declared that the newly-announced Ministry of The Amazon is little more

than a symbolic gesture, which will bring no practical solution to the social, ecological, economic and political crisis in the region.

Former FUNAI President Claudio Romero has recently stated that his agency will not accept interference in its affairs.

The Minister of the Economy, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, said to be against the creation of this new Ministry, declared that, in practice it will be no more than a department of the Presidency with minimal staff. Or as Cardoso puts it, it will be "A Minister without a Ministry."

Worker's Party President Luiz Ignácio Lula da Silva agrees. What good is it to create still another bureaucracy, he asks, when the existing bureaucracies do nothing and the underlying political will to help the native peoples is lacking?

To be sure, President Franco's choice for the post -- Ambassador Rubens Ricupero, currently serving in Washington -- is a positive one. He's known as a skilled negotiator. Plus, he is acknowledged for his instrumental role in the creation of the Amazon Pact as well as in the discussions that preceded the 1991 Earth Summit.

And to be sure, the appointment of a civilian might, if backed with authority, help to counterbalance, to some extent, the military's narrow emphasis on "national security," which, until now, has been the dominant lobbying theme behind Brazil's official policy for the Amazon.

It is doubtful, however, whether the new Minister will have that authority. He will be unable to overrule powerful forces within the government such as the military ministries and the Strategic Affairs Secretariat. Some high ranking military officials are already letting it be known that they will not take orders from the new minister.

Thus, with little staffing and even less authority, the new Ministry of The Amazon, although well intentioned, could die a premature death.

Disturbing Similarities With The Holocaust And "Ethnic Cleansing"

Stripping away the veneer of these symbolic gestures, and cutting through the disputes over petty details surrounding the

massacres, one single, disturbing pattern emerges: The Yanomami region now displays all of the explosive elements associated with genocide. The most critical of these elements are:

1. A majority population that feels economically deprived and is desperate for change at virtually any cost.
2. A minority population which is in control of strategic resources viewed by the majority as critical for its survival or economic progress.
3. An officially sanctioned racism which maintains, as its central thesis, that the minority group is "subhuman" and outside the protection of the legal system.
4. A political and economic power structure which deliberately encourages the majority population to commit its crimes against the minority.

These factors have been present during every incident of mass murder -- from the holocaust suffered by the Jews during World War II to the "ethnic cleansing" of the Bosnian Muslims today. And, sadly, recent Yanomami massacres bring home the dire reality that these same factors are also present in the Brazilian Amazon today:

1. The majority non-native populations are spearheaded by the gold miners, followed closely by loggers and ranchers and led by local politicians, entrepreneurs plus key elements of the military. They view the Yanomami -- and all the other indigenous nations -- as an obstacle to quick riches which they feel should be theirs for the taking.

They are frustrated that the deaths of over 1,500 Yanomami -- in epidemics caused by gold miner invasions -- have still not been enough to drive them off. And this frustration has been growing rapidly in recent months. The massacres were the sad result.

2. The Yanomami minority, for the moment at least, is still largely in control of their traditional lands, rich in the gold and other resources. Attempts to protect the Yanomami by removing the invaders have been sporadic. But support for the invaders by politicians, entrepreneurs and military officers has been widespread and continuous.

3. The theory that native populations are inferior is not a new one. It has been a staple of race relations in the Americas since the very first contact over 500 years ago. And in the late 20th century Amazon, this most dangerous form of racism is still commonplace.
4. The landowners, mining companies, and lumber companies use the poor prospectors and landless peasants as pawns in a massive land grab. First they hurl them into Indian territories, where they devastate the Indian populations and the environment. Later, they take the land and its riches by expelling squatters and prospectors to the next frontier.

We are not forecasting a holocaust. Nor are we taking the extreme position that such a disaster is probable. Rather, we are pointing out that, unless dramatic -- and concrete -- action is taken to stop it, the violence is bound to escalate. Ultimately, the consequences of complacency will be catastrophic.

Why The Stakes Are So High

A lot of people today talk about saving the Amazon Rainforest and its peoples. But the Yanomami -- and all other indigenous and extractive peoples in Brazil -- are the ones on the front line in the battle to protect their peoples and their homeland from destruction. They're getting killed and slaughtered for the "crime" of simply wanting to live peacefully, in harmony with nature, as they've done for uncounted generations.

FUNAI is supposed to be protecting their interests. But government officials admit that FUNAI is corrupt, duplicitous and broke. The decimation of the native populations that occurred in North America a century ago is happening in Brazil all over again right now.

Only this time, the stakes are much higher. This time it is the entire planet that's being threatened. The indigenous peoples of the Amazon are protecting the largest biological emporium on the earth -- the Amazon Rainforest. When they're gone, the rainforest will also be gone.

Rays of Hope

The situation, although bleak, is far from hopeless. There are many in power in Brazil that are as horror stricken by recent

events as we are. There is widespread support among democratic leaders for the native populations. And perhaps most heartening, there are even high ranking officers in the Army who oppose the Calha Norte and support the Yanomami Reserve.

One spokesman for this group is Senator Jarbas Passarinho, a former Army Colonel, and a three-time minister under the military dictatorship (1964-1985). He was the Minister of Justice in 1991 who prepared the park decree. Plus, in a well-read Military Club Magazine, he has recently published an article debunking the concept that the Yanomami pose a threat to national security.

Thus, the Brazilian military must not be viewed as a monolith. There's still hope that progressive elements will defend the Indian's constitutional rights. But they will be unable to do so without strong domestic and international support.

That's why friends of the Yanomami are continuing their efforts to save the Yanomami and the other 200 indigenous peoples of Brazil from another Haximu tragedy.

Toward this end, anthropologist Beto Ricardo of the Ecumenical and Documentation Center (CEDI) in São Paulo has proposed a list of questions which represent the concerns of many Yanomami friends in Brazil and around the world.

1. To the Yanomami, immersed in their own world and tormented by chronic aggressions which threaten their existence as a people: "Will you be able to defend and control your territory, legally demarcated and secured by the Brazilian Constitution?"
2. To the 200 indigenous peoples, their organizations and the organizations which support their struggles: "Can you help guarantee the indigenous people's constitutional rights [to their land and cultural heritage] secured by the Brazilian Constitution of 1988, and now threatened by the constitutional revision of 1993?"
3. To [President] Itamar Franco's government, who now struggles to complete his term: "Will you be able to order a complete investigation of the massacre, [without cover-ups] and the punishment of the criminals?"

"Will you be able, under the auspices of the law, to condemn the mining entrepreneurs and anti-native politicians who, in

Roraima, encourage the invasion of the Yanomami area?

"Will you be able to reaffirm the constitutional rights of the Yanomami to their demarcated land, establish a decent monitoring system and secure medical treatment for the sick?"

"Will you be able to demarcate all of Brazil's indigenous lands, as determined by the 1988 Constitution?"

"Will you have the political will to guarantee the indigenous populations the achievement of this goal? How long will the delays, inaction and complacency allow local anti-indigenous interests to prevail?"

4. To the military, in the midst of an identity crisis and suffering from low wages: "Can't you pursue your projects and a doctrine of 'national security' [while at the same time maintaining] ... the existence of indigenous peoples near the borders? [Can't you] protect their collective rights, recognized by the Brazilian Constitution, without having to create phantom enemies?"
5. To the democratic segment of Brazilian society, which is fighting for better living conditions, and for its basic and undeniable individual human rights ...: "When will it be possible to eliminate the general ignorance about indigenous peoples, which reaches even the most well-intentioned citizens?"
6. To the concerned citizens from Brazil and to their allies around the world, who share the view that the indigenous populations and the Amazon Rainforest should remain on the future face of the planet ... who questions all development models that have appeared so far: "Will we be able to avoid the barbarie and the destruction of planet Earth?"

This time, however, symbolic gestures will just not be enough. We must focus our attention on concrete action with tangible -- and immediately achievable -- results.

Amanaka'a And Its Current Activities

Amanaka'a is a non-profit organization which advocates the protection of the Rainforest and its peoples. The organization acts as a defacto "Embassy" in the United States for the native leaders of the Amazon. And Amanaka'a has been specifically asked to speak for CCPY in the U.S.

We have sponsored yearly trips to New York and Washington for native leaders such as chief Yanomami spokesman Davi Kopenawa; Kumai Waiampi and Chief Waiwai Waiampi of the Waiampi nation of Amapá; Megaron Txucurramae, leader of the Kayapó and Director of the Xingú National Park; Ailton Krenak, President of the Alliance of the Peoples of the Forest, plus many others.

We maintain direct and regular contact with these leaders throughout the year. And we are a primary information source for matters pertaining to the peoples of the Amazon rainforest and their environment.

Amanaka'a has highlighted the plight of the Yanomami since it was founded. And in May of this year, we began a petition drive in support of the Yanomami.

Since we first learned of the massacres on August 18, we have been coordinating a series of actions -- rallies, a group letter, and individual letters. But this is just the beginning.

Here are some steps you can take right now to help the Yanomami people:

Step 1

Help Finance Davi Yanomami's Friendship Trips

Even before the massacres, when Davi Yanomami came to visit us this past April, he was distraught, frustrated and deeply disappointed.

Despite the promises made to him by U.S. officials and others during his year-earlier visit, he saw no concrete action to help his people. Unless this pattern changed, he vowed to return to the United Nations to give back the Global 500 prize. "What good is this prize," he said, "if my people just continue to die?"

Davi has a very simple and constructive proposal: He will visit the scores of still-uncontacted Yanomami villages to warn them of the possible dangers.

Right now, only the Yanomami Indians bordering the access points have been in contact with gold miners. Behind these areas of immediate access, few have ever seen a white man. Most don't even know of their existence.

So when the gold prospectors are dropped off in remote areas -- by airplanes run by mining entrepreneurs -- they are welcomed with open arms. The Yanomami give them food and shelter in exchange for worthless trinkets, pots and pans. Within days, the villages are decimated by contagious diseases for which the Yanomami have no immunity.

All Davi wants is to get there first. He will visit the villages. He will warn them about the dangers of contact with invading gold miners. He will teach them how to avoid contact; and exactly what to do if contact occurs. With that simple step, he expects to head off countless disasters waiting to happen. This can, indeed, make a significant difference toward stopping the inevitable death and destruction that comes with every first contact.

To make these trips possible, Davi must rent air transportation at the cost of approximately \$2,000 per trip. Since he hopes to make 25 trips over the next year, \$50,000 is needed to finance a full year of travel to cover the entire Yanomami territory in Brazil. Contributors should send donations to Davi Yanomami Friendship Trips, care of Amanaka'a, 339 Lafayette Street, Suite 8, New York, NY 10012

Step 2

Help Us Build The Balawau Medical Post

Gold miners are now penetrating the region through a new access point near Balawau, bringing with them measles, influenza and malaria which can devastate 20%, 30%, even 40% of the population in a given village.

However, throughout the entire region, the only health post which is helping the Yanomami defend themselves against the contagious diseases is at Demini, run by Davi Kopenawa. The Yanomami in the Northern area, where the gold miners are now penetrating *en masse*, and where the recent massacres occurred, have no access to the Demini post. They're much too far away.

That's why Davi Kopenawa has presented us with a second excellent project proposal: To build a new health post strategically located at Balawau, in the heart of the Northern region.

Davi has already picked the exact site. The volunteer

medical staff is ready to begin immediately. He needs only \$50,000 to build the entire facility. Amanaka'a is currently accepting contributions for this project as well.

Step 3
Letter To Davi Kopenawa and the Yanomami People

If you can't give money to Davi -- or even if you can -- please write to him and his people.

This has been a shocking tragedy for the Yanomami. The threat of the gold miners is intensely frightening. Many feel abandoned by a government they barely understand, and forgotten by the outside world they were told was trying to help them.

Letters from you to Davi and his people, expressing your condolences, your sympathy and your resolve to help -- can make a big difference. It can give them the courage and moral fortitude to confront this onslaught.

Letters from children will be especially appreciated. The Yanomami love children and Davi himself is no exception. When he visits New York, he always has the patience, no matter how busy his schedule, to sit with Edward Weiss, the son of the Amanaka'a Executive Director, and paint him as a warrior. If you have children, please take some time from your busy schedule to ask them to write.

Send your letters directly to Amanaka'a. We will then get them to Claudia, the coordinator of CCPY in São Paulo. She's one of the handful of people in the world who speaks Yanomami fluently.

She will immediately get on the ham radio and read them, in Yanomami, directly to Davi. Nothing could be more effective in conveying to him and his people the message that they're not alone.

Address your letters and faxes to:

DAVI KOPENAWA YANOMAMI
Amanaka'a Amazon Network
339 Lafayette, #8
New York, NY 10012
Fax: (212) 674 9139

Step 4 Petition Drive

Our petition is addressed to President Itamar Franco. It urges him to use the power of his presidency to remove all gold miners from the Yanomami Reserve.

So far, over 10,000 signatures have been collected, with more pouring in daily from all over the U.S. and overseas. Everyone -- from street vendors to elementary schools to major organizations -- is joining. For copies, just call John Friede at 212-674-4646. The deadline for getting the signed petitions into our hands is October 5.

Step 5 Letter Campaign To Presidents

We are writing to the presidents of Brazil and of Venezuela. Please join us in this campaign. You'd be surprised to see how much of an impact it has. The authorities are extremely sensitive to world opinion. Time and time again, they have changed policy -- sometimes dramatically -- in response to foreign pressure. Please focus your letters on three immediate goals:

- (1) A thorough and fair investigation of the massacres on both sides of the border;
- (2) the capture and punishment of the criminals and their leaders; and
- (3) the removal of all gold miners and other invaders from Yanomami territory.

The addresses are:

DR. ITAMAR FRANCO, President of Brazil
Presidente do Brasil
Palacio do Planalto
CEP 70150-900, Brasilia DF Brasil
Fax: 011 55 61 226 7566

DR. RAMON VELAZQUES,
President of Venezuela
Palacio de Miraflores
Caracas, Venezuela
Fax: 011 582 861 1101

Step 6

Group Letter To The President of Venezuela

A group letter, signed by 70 organizations, has already been sent to President Itamar Franco through Ambassador Marcos Cesar Naslausky, head of the Brazilian Consulate in New York.

But it's still an ongoing project. Currently, the letter is being revised to take into account the new facts, and will also be sent to President Ramon Velazques of Venezuela.

If you have already signed the letter, give us the go-ahead to keep your name on it. Please let us know before October 1, at the latest. If you have not yet signed on, there's still time to do so.

Step 7

Protest Vigils

The protest vigils last month were an overwhelming success. In the months ahead, we expect more of the same, as the momentum for action continues to build. Here's are the next two events:

September 16 Some 500 indigenous leaders from throughout Brazil are convening in Brasilia to protest and lobby both against the Yanomami massacre and for the demarcation of all indigenous lands. In solidarity with these leaders, Dr. Terence Turner is calling for an international protest. Call the Brazilian embassy and consulates to register your strong opinion.

October 5 This day is the deadline for the official demarcation of their territories, mandated by the Brazilian Constitution. A massive demonstration is being called by Amanaka'a in order to express solidarity with the Yanomami and all other indigenous peoples of Brazil.

We need your help, and we need you to be there with us. Please wear black. A time and place will be announced shortly. Call John Friede at 212-674-4646 for the details.

