



one
year on

Uncontacted tribes face extinction

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EXACTLY ONE YEAR AGO, ON 29 MAY 2008, SURVIVAL INTERNATIONAL RELEASED PHOTOS OF UNCONTACTED INDIANS DEEP IN THE BRAZILIAN AMAZON, NEAR THE BORDER WITH PERU.

The photos made headlines around the world and threw uncontacted tribes into the international spotlight, provoking public outrage at the threats to their land, livelihoods and lives.

In spite of this, however, uncontacted tribes around the world are facing extinction. Governments, companies and others ignore their rights, and invade and destroy their land with impunity.

This report exposes the plight of the world's most threatened uncontacted tribes. They live in five locations in three South American countries: Paraguay, Brazil and Peru. They are just a few of the more than 100 uncontacted tribes known to exist worldwide – in South America, the Indian Ocean, and on the island of New Guinea.

THREATS

Uncontacted tribes face two principal threats to their survival. By far the greatest is their lack of immunity to common Western diseases such as influenza, chicken pox, measles, and a host of respiratory diseases. Even where 'first contact' between an isolated tribe and outsiders is carefully managed, it is common for significant numbers of tribespeople to die in the months following contact.

Where such encounters are not managed, with medical plans in place, the entire tribe, or a large proportion of it, can be wiped out. Such catastrophes have occurred repeatedly in the Amazon, and not just in the distant past: in 1996, for example, at least half the Murunahua Indians died after they were contacted by illegal mahogany loggers.

The other key threat is simply violence: in several of the cases outlined in this report the tribespeople face gangs of heavily-armed loggers who are likely to shoot them on sight.

Publication of the photos a year ago brought about a huge groundswell of support for the plight of uncontacted tribal people. But many governments still refuse to take the simple step – properly protecting their territories – that will actually ensure the tribes' survival.



'When the Murunahua were contacted by loggers, many of them died. Diseases hit them and they died. The old people especially couldn't bear it. They had never known those kinds of diseases before.'

Armando, Yaminahua Indian, Peru, describing the neighbouring Murunahua tribe's first contact.

1: THE AWÁ, MARANHÃO, BRAZIL



The Awá are fleeing from bulldozers rapidly destroying their land in the Brazilian Amazon. Illegal loggers, cattle-ranchers and settlers are invading.

The number of uncontacted Awá is estimated to be sixty. In total, the tribe, one of the last truly nomadic groups in Brazil, numbers about 300.

The loggers are felling valuable hardwoods. Logging roads have already been bulldozed through a part of Awá territory where uncontacted groups are living. The ranchers want land to graze cattle for beef, for national and international consumption.

The government recognizes the Awá as the legal owners of their land, but the authorities are failing to stop the invasions. The loggers regularly block roads to prevent government teams from entering the area to investigate.

The European Union and World Bank funded a massive development project (Projeto Grande Carajás) in the 1980s which included the world's largest iron ore mine. The railway built to transport the mine's ore cuts through the Awá territory. More than two thirds of the Awá contacted during that period died.

One of the survivors is a man called Karapiru. He lived alone for ten years after his entire family was killed by a rancher's gunman, believing himself the only Awá of his group still alive.

2: RIO PARDO INDIANS, MATO GROSSO, BRAZIL

Uncontacted Indians living along the River Pardo in the western Brazilian Amazon are seeing their lands invaded and destroyed by illegal loggers.

As a result, the Indians are constantly on the move, unable to cultivate crops and relying solely on hunting, gathering and fishing. It is believed that the women have even stopped giving birth.

In a completely unexpected move, a federal prosecutor in Brazil launched an investigation into the genocide of the Indians of the Rio Pardo. Evidence suggests that the loggers are deliberately keeping the Indians on the run.

'We live in the depths of the forest and we are getting cornered as the whites close in on us. We are always fleeing. We love the forest because we were born here. Without the forest we are nobody and we have no way of surviving.'

To'o, an Awá man, Brazil.



Hastily abandoned malocca, Rio Pardo, Brazil

The Brazilian government is in the process of recognizing the Indians as the legal owners of their land but appear unable, or unwilling, to stop the loggers from invading. Many of the loggers operate out of Colniza, one of Brazil's most violent frontier towns.

Little is known about the identity of the Indians. They may belong to the larger Kawahiva group, but no one can be sure. It is unlikely they number more than 50 people.

Plenty of evidence for the Rio Pardo Indians has been found, including their communal houses, arrows, baskets, hammocks, and footprints along river banks.

3: ENVIRA RIVER INDIANS, UCAYALI, PERU



Illegal loggers have been invading territory belonging to uncontacted Indians in the south-east of Peru, forcing the Indians to flee across the border into nearby Brazil, where they are likely to come into conflict with other, similarly isolated, Indians already living in Brazil. It was a community of this latter group that was the subject of the photos released last year.

The Indians have been sighted numerous times in Brazil and plenty of physical evidence of them has been collected. This includes arrows belonging to them and photos of houses built by them.

This evidence has been collected by members of the Brazilian government's Indian Affairs Department, FUNAI. FUNAI has a 'protection post' very close to the border with Peru.

The loggers are mainly seeking mahogany and cedar. Peru boasts some of the last commercially-viable mahogany trees anywhere in the world.

'(There has been a) forced migration of groups in Peru, caused by mahogany exploration in the headwaters of the Jurua, Purus and Envira (rivers in Peru),' says José Carlos Meirelles, head of the FUNAI post.

Despite the evidence, Peru's government has failed publicly to accept that uncontacted Indians are fleeing from Peru to Brazil. Peru's president, Alan Garcia, has even suggested the tribes do not exist.

'The loggers are going to clean out the Indians. They will just shoot them to kill them.'

Fieldworker, Brazil.

'The collection of arrows on my table is piling up... The situation will only be resolved when the Indians are left alone on the other side of the border.'

José Carlos Meirelles, FUNAI, Brazil.



4: NAPO-TIGRE INDIANS, LORETO, PERU

Multinational oil companies are working inside the territories of at least two uncontacted tribes living between the Napo and Tigre rivers in northern Peru.

One of them, Perenco (an Anglo-French company), recently revealed its intention to send hundreds of workers into the region. According to the company, one oil well has already been drilled.

In recent weeks, indigenous protesters have blockaded the Napo river in order to prevent Perenco boats from passing. In response, a naval gunboat was called in to break the blockade.

The area where Perenco is working is in the middle of a proposed reserve for the Indians. Perenco's presence in the region is opposed by indigenous organisations in Peru which have filed lawsuits against the company.

The identities of the uncontacted tribes are not clear, but one is believed to be a sub-group of the Waorani, and another is known as the 'Pananujuri'. Perenco denies the tribes exist.

Perenco's chairman, Francois Perrodo, recently met Peru's president, Alan Garcia. Days later, a law was passed declaring Perenco's work in the region a 'national necessity'.

Other companies involved in the Napo-Tigre area are Repsol-YPF, ConocoPhillips, the Colombian state oil company Ecopetrol, and the Brazilian state oil company Petrobras.



Spears left by uncontacted Indians as a message to bar outsiders from entering.

5: THE AYOREO-TOTOBIEGOSODE, ALTO PARAGUAY, PARAGUAY



The Ayoreo-Totobiegosode's land in the Chaco forest of western Paraguay is being bulldozed by Brazilian ranchers wanting to graze cattle for beef. The amount of land cleared almost tripled last year.

The number of uncontacted Totobiegosode is unclear, although the names and approximate ages of some of them are known. Some Totobiegosode have already been contacted – the most recent 'first contact' took place in 2004.

The names of the ranchers' companies are BBC S.A., River Plate S.A. and Yaguarete Pora S.A.. After the publication of satellite photos revealing Yaguarete's activities last year, the company had its licence to work in the area withdrawn by Paraguay's Environment Ministry.

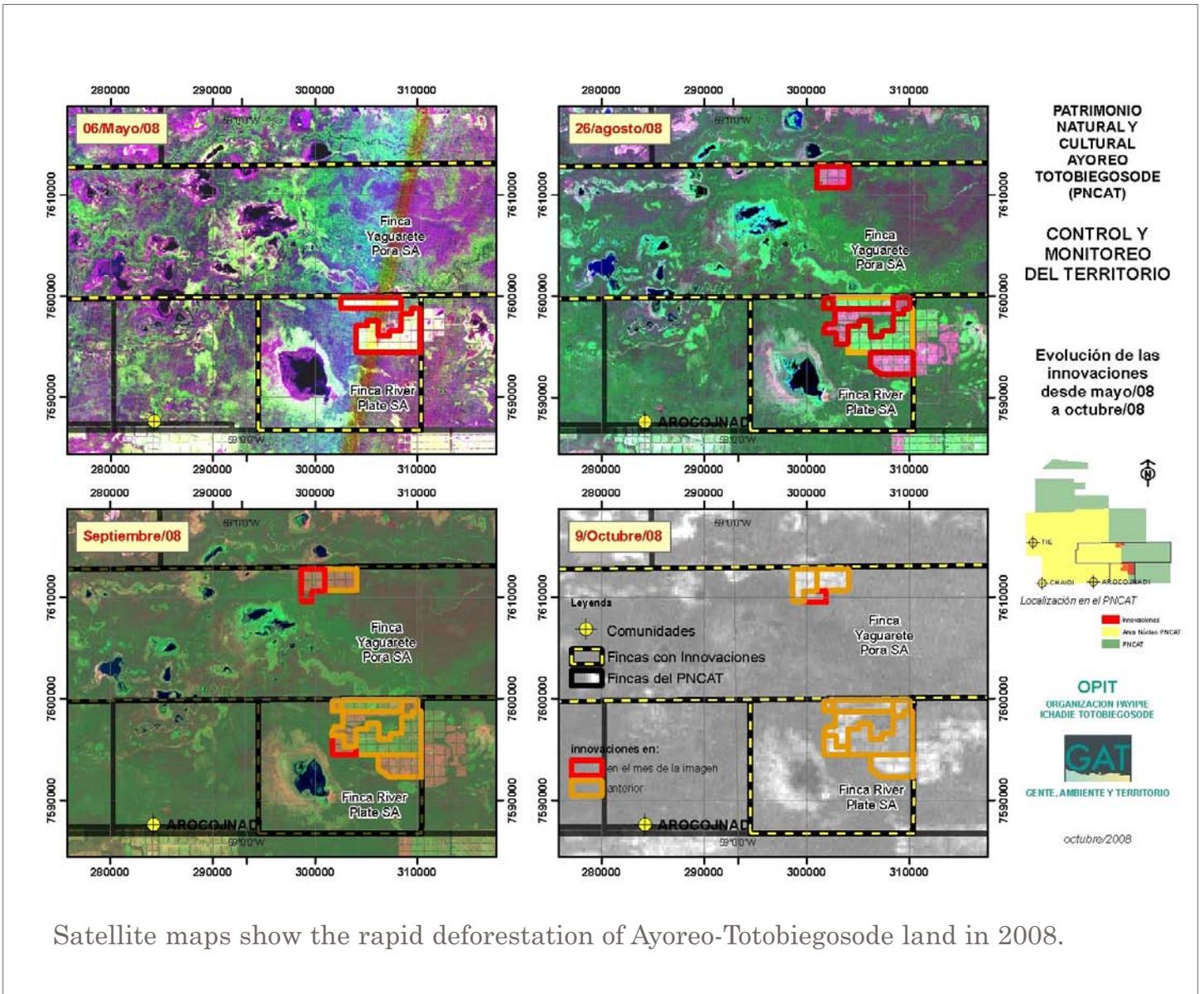
Yaguarete is now trying to regain that licence, leading to an outcry from the contacted Totobiegosode and local support organisations such as GAT (Gente, Ambiente, Territorio).

'The Environment Ministry must not grant a new licence to Yaguarete,' GAT urged. 'If it does, the last of the uncontacted Ayoreo-Totobiegosode could be wiped out.'

Some Totobiegosode were spotted towards the end of 2008, apparently fleeing the destruction of their forest. On one occasion a group of eight or nine men were seen.



A group of Ayoreo-Totobiegosode Indians first contacted in 2004, Paraguay.



Satellite maps show the rapid deforestation of Ayoreo-Totobiegosode land in 2008.



Uncontacted

One month after Survival released the photos of the uncontacted Indians to the world's press, Britain's The Observer newspaper cast doubt on the story. Their article in turn prompted further reports falsely alleging that the photos were a hoax. In August 2008, The Observer printed a retraction, admitting that its article was 'inaccurate, misleading [and] distorted', and making clear that the photos and Survival's accompanying press release were 'perfectly valid'.

For more information on uncontacted tribes, visit:

www.survival-international.org

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