

# To End 'Genocide' of Indigenous People, Lula Launches Raids Against Illegal Miners in Amazon

*Illegal mining in the Yanomami land has polluted water, degraded the landscape of the rainforest, and spread disease.*



Stripped land—illegal mining on Yanomami land in the Brazilian Amazon. Christian Braga / Greenpeace

by Julia Conley, Common Dreams, [www.commondreams.org](http://www.commondreams.org)

With Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva warning his administration “will not allow illegal mining on Indigenous lands,” the government announced Wednesday that environmental special forces destroyed at least one helicopter, an airplane, and a bulldozer used by “mining mafias” in the territory of the Yanomami people in the Amazon rainforest this week.

The raids aimed at removing illegal mining operations involving tens of thousands of ore and gold miners from the region began on Monday, just over a month after the leftist president, known as Lula, took office.

*The Guardian* reported that the special forces set up a base near the Uraricoera River, which illegal miners used during right-wing former President Jair Bolsonaro’s administration.

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Bolsonaro condemned the Yanomami people’s control of the land, the largest Indigenous territory in Brazil, and encouraged deforestation and mining in the Amazon. Roughly 25,000 illegal miners poured into the region during his four-year term.

The forces have seized aircraft, boats, and weapons from miners this week.

“We are in the process of removing illegal miners from Roraima,” Lula said on social media Tuesday, referring to Brazil’s northernmost state. “The situation that the Yanomami find themselves [in] near the [mining camp] is degrading.”

The Brazilian Institute of Environment and Renewable Natural Resources (IBAMA), the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI), and the newly-created Indigenous affairs ministry took part in coordinating the raids, with Defense Minister José Múcio monitoring the operation.

Sonia Guajajara, who was appointed by Lula to be Brazil’s first-ever minister of Indigenous affairs, surveyed the region, where nearly 30,000 Yanomami live, ahead of the operation.

“The Yanomami want peace—that is all they want,” Guajajara told *GloboNews*. “And this is what we are going to give them.”

In addition to degrading the landscape and polluting the waterways of the Brazilian Amazon, illegal mining in the Yanomami land has had a “devastating impact” on the health of the community, Greenpeace said last week:

The use of mercury in the activity poisons the land the Indigenous people use to plant food and the rivers they use to fish. By poisoning the water, mercury also gets into the people’s bodies, causing serious health problems, and even death. Besides that, the presence of the miners in the Indigenous territory exposes those living there to other diseases. An explosion in cases of malaria and malnutrition, due to the lack of access to food and traditional ways of production in the Yanomami land, has been a serious threat to the lives of the Indigenous people, especially children. 11,530 confirmed cases of malaria were recorded in 2022 alone.

At least 570 Yanomami children reportedly died of curable diseases during Bolsonaro’s administration, and dozens of children have been airlifted to hospitals in recent weeks, suffering from malnutrition and malaria.

“More than a humanitarian crisis, what I saw... was a genocide,” Lula said last month after a visit to the region. “A premeditated crime

NOTE: This article is an update to Tarcisio Beal’s article ‘How “Trumpism” and Big Money Poisoned Brazil’ in *La Voz’s* February 2023 issue.

against the Yanomami, committed by a government impervious to the suffering of the Brazilian people.”

On Tuesday, the president said his administration will “restructure everything that exists from the point of view of controlling our Indigenous lands, the environment.”

“We are going to try to create a new dynamic,” he added, “to have the results that Brazilian society wants.”

BIO: *Julia Conley is a staff writer for Common Dreams, a genuinely people-powered and reader-funded news outlet that exists to inform and inspire those fighting worldwide for a better future.*

## An agent watches as a structure and plane belonging to miners is engulfed in flames



Shack & plane burning- In this image provided by IBAMA, Brazil's Environmental Agency, an agent watches as a structure and plane belonging to miners is engulfed in flames in the Yanomami Indigenous territory, Roraima state, Brazil, Feb. 6, 2023. Brazilian authorities launched an operation to reclaim Yanomami Indigenous territory from thousands of illegal gold miners who have contaminated rivers and brought famine and disease to one of the most isolated populations of the world. (IBAMA via AP)

## Offense

Does white and black offend rainbows?

You know. My ancestors know.

Who has courage to speak?

Will you remain silent  
as in a court of law  
fearful to betray  
complicity?

Our legacies are  
entwined.  
Little heed paid to  
mine.

Yours carried  
on your tongue,  
in plats of your hair,  
in mortgaged souls  
filled with bullet holes,  
in fear for your child  
who sings blues  
every day  
on the way  
to school.

What do I know?

Some claim truth is too doleful to tell.  
History too sad to bear.  
Our pale children too fragile to hear.

Unseal the books.

Teach history that's real.  
Light lanterns of hope.  
Do not hide atrocities.  
Let all bells toll.  
Speak complete truth.  
Open closed eyes.  
Dispel every myth.  
Break this mournful spell.  
Let healing begin.

—Patricia Keoughan



## What is the Aroma of the Mountain Laurel Blossom?

It smells so good,  
I could drink it.

Sweeten the tea  
with the honey of the bee  
that fed on its nectar.

I know, I know,  
the flowers are poisonous  
and contain narcotics.

Maybe that's why  
the bouquet is so addictive.

I could relish its fragrance  
all year long if I could.

Can I get some cologne  
with the essence  
of this evergreen?

Sophora secundiflora!  
The name is a poem!  
The redolence is a muse!

I could shampoo my hair,  
and use crème rinse  
scented with the aura  
of the Mountain Laurel.

I would roll on deodorant  
with eau de Colorin.

I would sip mescal  
while I admire  
the Mescal Bean.

Also known as the Frigolito,  
the Frijollito, and the Frijolillo.  
Some call it the Big-drunk Bean

if you know what I mean.

The balm of its incense  
wafts from fence to fence,  
so why can't I bring it inside?

When I die,  
I want to be a butterfly,  
so I can be a pollinator,  
and swim in the perfume  
of this Legume.

I'll put my proboscis  
into the blossom of my desire.

And then, I'll expire.

—Don Mathis

