



REPAM CALLS FOR URGENT AND UNIFIED ACTION TO AVOID A HUMANITARIAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL TRAGEDY

Structural collapse in Amazonia

A tremendous force, on a scale never seen before, is devastating Amazonia in two dimensions that combine in a brutal manner: the Covid-19 pandemic, which engulfs the most vulnerable, and the uncontrolled increase in violence in the territories. The pain and the lament of peoples and the earth meld into a single cry.

“Indigenous peoples asked that the Church be their ally, a Church that would stand with them, a Church that would support their decisions, what they want and how they seek to build their future at this difficult time of pandemic.” (Cardinal Claudio Hummes).

In the various countries of Amazonia, the Church echoes the cries and the requests for assistance at a time when the very survival of this biome and its communities and indigenous peoples is threatened.

In **Bolivia**,¹ indigenous peoples denounce the government’s lack of coordination and consultation for preventing and combating the pandemic; they also emphasize that all information is not disseminated in the original languages recognized in the Constitution.

In **Colombia**,² the bishops acknowledge the government’s efforts, but stress that *“indigenous peoples, peasant farmers and people of African descent are the groups at greatest risk, because they were already living in a situation of structural poverty, with food insecurity and malnutrition, without access to health care and safe drinking water.”*

¹ Statement by the indigenous peoples of the lowlands of Bolivia about the Covid-19 health emergency, 28 April 2020.

² Statement by the bishops of Colombian Amazonía and Orinoquia to public officials and all citizens of Colombia.

Food insecurity among indigenous peoples is also a concern in **Venezuela**,³ where these peoples are threatened with contagion because of illegal mining in their territories and because Venezuelan migrants and people from outside of their territories cross their lands to return to their countries of origin. Indigenous peoples are taking steps to isolate themselves and maintain control of their territories, such as increasing crop production to achieve food sovereignty.

In **Brazil**, 32 attorneys from the Federal Public Ministry⁴ have declared that *“the risk of genocide among indigenous peoples requires emergency action from public entities.”* The National Indigenous Mobilization says that there is *“an evident intention by the government to keep the Indigenous Health Care Subsystem from functioning.”*⁵

In **Peru**, there is concern about the situation of various Amazonian peoples, including many indigenous people who have migrated to cities in search of work and are completely unprotected. The bishops of the Peruvian Amazon⁶ call on public officials to help those people return to their communities, ensuring that this is done according to protocols established by the Ministry of Health.

The Alliance of Indigenous Parliamentarians of Latin America has asked the World Health Organization to recommend that the region’s countries prioritize specific measures to guarantee protection of the lives of indigenous peoples in the face of this serious global pandemic.

The Coordinator of Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon River Basin (COICA) requests contributions to an emergency fund to protect the 3 million inhabitants of the tropical forest who are vulnerable to the novel coronavirus.

The Catholic Church, meanwhile, has made great efforts, particularly through Caritas in each region, to provide material and economic resources, as well as social assistance and spiritual support.

The virus of violence and the plundering of Amazonia

Besides this devastating attack on Amazonia, another virus continues to threaten people and the forest; as the Mixed Parliamentary Front for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Brazil has denounced:

³ Minerva Vitti, Centro Gumilla and REPAM-Venezuela.

⁴ Covid-19: MPF recommends urgent actions to protect health of indigenous peoples. Available at: <http://www.mpf.mp.br/df/sala-de-imprensa/noticias-df/covid-19-2013-mpf-recomenda-acoes-emergenciais-de-protecao-a-saude-dos-povos-indigenas>

⁵ <https://cimi.org.br/2020/04/nota-mobilizacao-nacional-indigena-exige-medidas-urgentes-em-defesa-da-saude-e-da-vida-dos-povos-originarios-do-brasil/>

⁶ Comunicado de los obispos de los Vicariatos Apostólicos de la Amazonía peruana - A las autoridades y a toda la ciudadanía del Peru, 22 April 2020

“Even as the pandemic slows the economy, illegal mining and deforestation in indigenous territories continue in full force.”⁷

In **Ecuador**,⁸ the Pan-Amazonian Church Network (REPAM) denounced the rupture of the Trans-Ecuadorian Pipeline System and the Heavy Crude Pipeline on 7 April 2020, which caused a serious oil spill and affected approximately 97,000 people living along the banks of the Coca and Napo rivers.

The 67 bishops of the Amazon in **Brazil** associate the current social and environmental crisis in the Amazonian biome with a significant decrease in inspections and constant political rhetoric by the federal government against environmental protection and the safeguarding of indigenous areas protected under the Federal Constitution. We see *“an immense humanitarian tragedy caused by structural collapse.”*⁹

The bishops particularly denounced draft legislation that would allow mining in indigenous territories, as well as parliamentary efforts to change Brazil’s land titling system, which would eliminate the agrarian reform and the land rights of indigenous peoples and traditional communities and favor land grabbing, deforestation and predatory companies, legalizing illegal occupation for mining and industrial agriculture on indigenous lands.

Mining is also a concern for the Policy Forum of **Guyana**, which denounces extractive activities that destroy the tropical forest, as well as the circulation of miners with heavy equipment, which pose a danger of contagion for communities in the interior of the country. The government declared gold mining an essential activity because of the recession caused by Covid-19 and the global increase in gold prices.

Commenting on the alarming increase of violence in rural areas, the Pastoral Land Commission¹⁰ states that in 2019, the vast majority of murders due to rural conflicts in Brazil (84%) occurred in Amazonia.

Because it has spoken out on these issues in various parts of Amazonia, the Church has been slandered and attacked, as occurred recently with shameful and baseless accusations against the Indigenist Missionary Council (CIMI) by the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI), which we repudiate.¹¹

⁷ Carta abierta del Frente Parlamentario Mixto en defensa de los derechos de los pueblos indígenas al Director General de la Organización Mundial de la Salud, 05 de mayo de 2020

⁸ <https://redamazonica.org/2020/04/repam-ecuador-derramamiento-de-petroleo-en-la-amazonia/>

⁹ Letter from the bishops of Brazilian Amazonia about the situation of peoples and the forest during the Covid-19 pandemic.

¹⁰ <https://www.cptnacional.org.br/publicacoes-2/destaque/5167-conflitos-no-campo-brasil-2019>

¹¹ <http://www.funai.gov.br/index.php/comunicacao/noticias/6079-osfatos>

Global Action in Defense of Amazonia

The care of people and the care of ecosystems are inseparable. The wisdom of the original peoples of the Amazon region “inspires care and respect for creation, with a clear consciousness of its limits, and prohibits its abuse. To abuse nature is to abuse our ancestors, our brothers and sisters, creation and the Creator, and to mortgage the future.”

When the indigenous peoples “remain on their land, they themselves care for it best.”

(Beloved Amazonia, No. 42)

This is a decisive time for Amazonia and for the world, a time of gestation of new relationships inspired by integral ecology, or for the loss of the dreams of the Synod for the Amazon if fear, special interests and pressure from those who possess great capital impose with increasing force the model of an “economy that kills.” (EG 53).

Pope Francis makes an urgent call for planetary solidarity: *“This is not a time for indifference (...), self-centeredness (...), division (...), forgetfulness. The crisis we are facing should not make us forget the many other crises that bring suffering to so many people”*¹²

José Gregorio Díaz Mirabal, a member of the Wakuenai Kurripako people of the Venezuelan Amazon and coordinator general of COICA, a close ally of REPAM, sums it up: *“This is a call from the indigenous peoples of Amazonia, because you are ignoring us.”*

REPAM calls us to united action. Indigenous peoples of Amazonia, civil society of Pan-Amazonia and of the world, the Catholic Church and all religious denominations concerned about the care of Creation, governments, international human rights institutions, the scientific community, artists and all people of good will, are called to join forces in defense of “beloved Amazonia, in all its splendor, its drama and its mystery” (QA 1).

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Quito – Ecuador, 18 May 2020.

¹² Urbi et Orbi, 12 April 2020