

Letter in Defense of the Amazon and Mother Earth, Against the Invasion of Capital, Extreme Violence and Green Scams

As members of the Indigenous Peoples Apurinã, Huni Kuim, Jaminawa, Shanenawa, Xavante and Yawanawa; of worker & extractivist communities¹; peasants; communities living along the rivers and streams; Quilombola communities; and as scholars and activists of movements and social organizations of the Brazilian Amazon, other Brazilian biomes, and from abroad, almost 100 of us have come together, in small groups and, due to the pandemic, connected by computers and phones - on May 13th and 14th, 2021 in the event - "Amazon besieged: Between Extreme Violence and Green Scams – People of the Forest in Defense of Mother Earth and against Capital Invasion".

We decided to continue to break the silence that the pandemic forced upon us. Its persistence has been facilitating, at an even more exacerbated speed, the rate of destruction, violence, invasion and appropriation by loggers and big landowners, and the corporations behind them that demand the timber, meat and other products extracted our life spaces, most of the time overlooked by big media and the general population. Due to the urgency of our situation, we address this letter of denunciation to those who seek to strengthen our struggles and hopes.

We are aware that the fascist policies of the current Brazilian president enable the crime of genocide. They foster and facilitate invasions into our territories and furthermore do their utmost to encourage the spread of the new coronavirus. We also understand that this genocide is inserted in the global project to destroy the Earth and to end life, led by the interests of capital accumulation.

On the one hand, we are exposed to direct violence carried out by illegal loggers, plantation and large farm owners and mega projects. While simultaneously, programs and projects - of "sustainable development" and of a "green economy" - presented as though they are "solutions" for us, for the forests and the world's climate, exert indirect, yet no less severe, violence such that they restrict our traditional coexistence with the forest, placing at risk our cultural and spiritual survival and threatening our food sovereignty, our ways of life and our relation with the territories.

This greenwashed capitalism has caused a backlash to our fight for land and rights in the last decades, specifically since 1999, when the self-proclaimed "Government of the Forest", began to transform Acre into a showcase of the "green economy", attracting massive investments by banks and development agencies and conservation NGOs. While never having been translated into improving life in our communities nor effectively reducing deforestation, these resources have been used to co-opt many of our leaders. The false promises of major improvements and the government and political-party interventions have divided our communities and torn apart our common struggle, in addition to increasing timber extraction and livestock activity around and within our territories.

1 In Brazil, the term *extractivist communities* refers to communities who sustain their life and culture with rubber tapping, gathering, hunting and fishing activities.

Beyond being besieged by these two forms of direct and indirect violence perpetrated by capitalist companies and because we coexist with the land, we are even more affected by the changes in the climate and the forest, which are Mother Earth's responses to the global project of destruction and death include floods, droughts, the extinction of various plants and animals and the appearance of new diseases, such as Covid-19.

We firmly condemn the following situations:

- Land grabbing, extensive illegal deforestation and invasions into our territories, the poisoning of our streams with pesticides, threats of violent dispossession and assassination of forest dwellers have taken on unprecedented proportions in the Brazilian Amazon. Instead of protecting our rights when facing this situation, the government has actually facilitated more and more depredation of Amazon land. When we denounce these acts to the responsible government entity, we receive no response and our alerts go unheard.
- The demarcation of territories is a crucial element in the fight for survival for nearly 180 Indigenous Peoples in the Brazilian Amazon. Today in the Brazilian Congress, the ruralist and evangelical parties continuously launch increasingly violent attacks against this Constitutional right and try to destroy this right and impede any future demarcations, specifically through the Proposed Constitutional Amendment 215 and the establishment of a "marco temporal" (*a thesis defended by those capitalist sectors directly interested in indigenous lands, claiming that the indigenous peoples can only claim the lands that are traditionally occupied by them if they occupied and owned these lands on the date when Brazil's last constitution was proclaimed (05/10/1988), ignoring the whole historical process of violent eviction of indigenous peoples from their territories*).
- The offsetting projects of forest carbon or biodiversity, which are advancing throughout the Amazon, namely REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation, PSA (Payment for Environmental Services) or, more recently, "Nature-based solutions" are also part of a broad process that is trying to take control of our spaces and ways of life. We have reached the conclusion that the continuous name changes and the incomprehensibility of the acronyms and technical terms that accompany these projects and programs, which prevent any transparency and effective participation on our part, are intentional and serve to obfuscate the true nature of these undertakings and policies, which seek only to legitimize the continued pollution and destruction of nature by industries, especially those in Germany, the United Kingdom, the United States and other countries where the largest polluters in the world have their headquarters. We feel that in this context the word "sequester", refers less to the often mentioned carbon but more specifically to the Amazon as a space for life and diversity. While the promoters and intermediaries of these projects are making a profit, rules and restrictions on land use are being imposed upon us, and the so-called "Benefit Sharing", if any, is restricted to the donation of some consumer goods, trinkets such as recycled tin can stoves, water filters or oral hygiene kits. In our view, the function of these projects is comparable to that of the nasal ring that farmers place on the ox to guide and control it. To the degree that we accept them, we are surrendering our self-determination.

- We are concerned about various public policies, government programs and the creation of laws that permit the transformation of the Amazon into a carbon sink and gradually "safeguarded" while criminalizing and expelling people from the forest: the German government REM program ("REDD Early Movers" in English) supported for years the implementation of the Incentive System for Environmental Services (SISA) by the "Government of the Forest" in Acre. The situation of communities in Acre has worsened during this period, while cattle ranching, logging and deforestation have expanded. To this day, we do not know what happened to the resources paid under the programme. Now, REM seeks to impose REDD in Mato Grosso, the Brazilian state infamous for its agribusiness, and we fear that the main beneficiaries of these resources there will be the oligarchies linked to this sector. In both Acre and Mato Grosso, REM does not include support, much less guarantees for the demarcation of Indigenous lands. Another process that concerns us is the 2008 creation of the Governors' Task Force for Climate and Forests (GCF), and the 2010 agreement between the governments of Acre, California (USA) and Chiapas (Mexico). These initiatives aim to trade REDD credits from our forests to industries. While these industries, such as refineries in California, gain their "right to pollute", the urban communities that live close to them continue to be directly affected by the emission of harmful gases. We declare our solidarity with these communities and reiterate that we refuse any "benefits" from such businesses.

- The communities' right to free, prior and informed consent, as provided for by the ILO's Indigenous Peoples and Tribes 169 Convention, is not respected in the projects like REDD and PSA nor in the implementation of agribusiness product flow infrastructure mega projects. At times, two or three people are called to a meeting to be able to claim later on that consultation was held.

- Although various women's organizations fight for increased participation in the construction of policies and projects, there still does not exist effective participation by Indigenous and peasant women in these processes. In this context, we refute the testimony of one of our relatives who participates in the GCF "indigenous program". In a video produced and released over the internet by the Pro-Indian Commission, she refers to Indigenous women's protagonism in the decision-making arenas over environmental policies and Indigenous rights. This protagonism does not exist, and this woman does not represent us. If the GCF considered the real voices of Indigenous women, it would cease its attempts to impose REDD on our territories.

- The State has become an accomplice in this enormous depredation and continues to enable the acquisition of control over Amazon land on behalf of capitalist interests. For example, the Rural Environmental Registry (CAR in Portuguese), as prescribed by the 2012 new Forestry Code in conjunction with laws and decrees and government programs that have been created in parallel, supposedly to regularize land tenure, facilitates not only acts of land grabbing but also programs like REDD.

- During the great flood that occurred in Acre in March 2021, many Indigenous Peoples' communities, and fields and homes of peasants and riverside communities were destroyed, and many are still unable to adequately feed their families.
- Community hunting and wood use prohibitions and the environmental inspection systems in our territories have exacerbated the food and housing crises.
- Our young people are perpetually seduced by consumerism which the dominant development model has imposed and, more and more, they end up leaving their villages and become lost in the cities' peripheries.
- As a consequence of social exclusion and deprivation, crime and violence have been increasing not only in the city but also in the rural areas and in forest communities. In the present scenario with the government's policy of death, dominant political groups and the police are not only not deterring but are increasingly instigating and promoting even more such deeds. Not only in the rural areas but also in the cities, corporations in complicity with governments threaten, expropriate and dispossess people from their homes. We express our solidarity with the almost 1500 families from Vila Nazare in Porto Alegre who have lost their homes and are watching the community where they lived for more than 50 years be erased from the map as a result of the Salgado Filho Airport runway extension, a concession granted to the German corporation Fraport. While at the same time, airlines and petroleum companies that have benefitted from this project, purport to "compensate" their carbon emissions through REDD projects in the Amazon. In this manner, violence and destruction is perpetuated while they pronounce on their websites their Reduction Scheme for International Aviation (CORSIA/ICAO) as an "opportunity for Brazil" and post claims that they are protecting the forest.
- In this same context, we manifest our solidarity with the people who live in the Jacarezinho community where a couple of days before our event, the worst massacre in the history of Rio de Janeiro occurred. We vehemently express our repudiation of the Mato Grosso State Legislative Assembly's motion of support on May 11th and the subsequent motion of applause by the Cuiaba City Council on May 13th, congratulating the police operation that was responsible for the massacre in Rio de Janeiro. We demand that this case be immediately investigated with transparency and that the State fulfill its responsibility of deterring violence instead of encouraging and perpetrating it.

In the face of the situations described above, we resolved the following:

- We shall strengthen the discussion and reflection process and resistance against invasions by capital and its "green" scams in the Amazon. This process started with the Letter of Acre in 2011 and since then, we held a number of encounters, engaged in protests, declarations and collective mobilization actions in Brazil and internationally, until these activities were interrupted by the pandemic but are being resumed through this encounter with which we are hoping to break the silence and seek once again to strengthen our struggles.

- Our hope is in maintaining our presence in our territories. We are not only communities and Indigenous Peoples who live in the forest but are also communities and Indigenous Peoples of the Forest. The forest and us are allies, in other words, one cannot live without the other. A large part of what urban dwellers buy in the pharmacy and the supermarket, is provided to us by the forest.
- We are happy to not participate in the white man's destructive insanities which claim to be "civilized". Instead of accepting the projects of death that are imposed from the top down, we will continue to construct from the bottom up, our own life projects. We shall reaffirm and renew traditional practices and those of agroecology while also cultivating what is referred to by Peoples of the Pano languages as *Ihiwei Nakaki*, in Quechua it is called *Sumak Kawsay* and is translated into English as well-being: a full life with a high degree of autonomy and dignity, such as the forest offers us.
- Instead of accepting immediate "benefits" and "opportunities" that end up holding us hostage to the hidden interests of the green economy projects, we will make our own decisions over the long term, contemplating the lives of our sons and daughters and the generations to come.
- We will dialogue with our young people so that they do not succumb to this consumerist lifestyle and so that they can choose a life allied with the forest and fight in defence of their/our territories.
- We want to strengthen our alliances with urban communities which also live in situations of exclusion, dispossession and violence and who, like us, want to fight for their rights, their spaces and their ways of life.

We appeal to Brazil and the world's civil society who are in solidarity with our struggle for survival, for the Amazon forest and for the Earth's life and who refute the false solutions of "green" capitalism. Let's continue working and fighting together to stop the extinction of life and that of the Amazon and throughout the world due to the uncontrolled growth of the capitalist economy. Communication, denunciation and mobilization are our weapons, and unity is our strength.