

Summer Newsletter, 2000

Rainforest Foundation-US

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Center for Amerindian Rights and Environmental Law Opens

The ceremonial opening held on March 24th 2000, was attended by some 25 Captains (Amerindian leaders) the former President of Guyana, Janet Jagan, Prime Minister Sam Hinds, the Canadian and British High Commissioners, and the American Ambassador. Representatives from mining interests also attended the opening.

60,000 Amerindians (Guyana's Indigenous peoples) will have access to legal representation provided by the first facility of its kind in Guyana, as of April 1st 2000. The Center for Amerindian Rights and Environmental Law based in Georgetown has the goal of protecting Amerindian communities' basic rights and environment currently threatened by mining and logging activity.

This collaborative venture between the Rainforest Foundation and our Guyanese partner, the Amerindian Peoples Association (APA) is being spearheaded by one of Guyana's leading lawyers, Melinda Janki, who will use her experience to continue work initiated by the Amerindian communities, while training Amerindians to ultimately run the Center themselves.

The opening of the Center comes at a critical juncture in the history of Guyana's Amerindians. While the government undertakes its review of the country's constitution it is essential that Amerindian rights be clearly articulated. Of primary concern to the communities will be revisions that may effect their right to ancestral lands. As an independent, non-governmental, non-political organization, the Center will work to ensure that the rights of Guyana's first peoples are respected. In doing so, protecting Amerindian homelands that are being given away to foreign interests in the form of logging and mining concessions.

An essential function of the Center will be the training of all communities to better understand their rights. The Center will include a scholarship component allowing Amerindians to be formally trained in the law, in order to represent their interests. David James, Treasurer of the APA (and a founding member) will be the first Amerindian to participate in this program, and the first Amerindian to attend law school in the country's history.



Photo credit: Ivor Marslow - Tony James (center) and US Ambassador James Mack (left).

Transcript of Toshao Tony James' Speech at the Opening of the Center for Amerindian Rights and Environmental Law.

It is indeed a pleasure and an honor to stand here in front of all of you tonight on behalf of my Amerindian brothers and sisters. It is good that you are here as part and parcel of this gathering to listen to something which is very important to us and which has an historic meaning for us.

You will realize that since 500 years ago a lot of things have happened since people came across the great water. At the break of the new millennium we have seen the strides forward that Amerindians have made to address our struggles. It is good to note that people are beginning to realize the importance of our participation and the importance of consulting with us, the first peoples of Guyana.

As you will agree that from the time the other people came here we were the first peoples of Guyana and protectors of this land. We were always here and we will continue to be here. Our ancestors entrusted the land to us for us to continue to protect it and now we will have to pass on these same lands to the generations that are coming up. The land belongs to us and we belong to the land. Our cultures are linked to

Continued...

Transcript of Toshao Tony James' Speech at the Opening of the Center for Amerindian Rights and Environmental Law.

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the land. Our opinion of the land is different to other peoples' opinions. The land is very sacred because of our cultures, because of our activities like hunting, fishing, gathering nuts and just for walking in the forest for the quiet enjoyment of our Amerindian brothers and sisters.

Some people may not be in favor of the kind of struggles or the kind of activities that we sometimes get ourselves into, but we will and must be heard, we will no longer be silent. You will agree that over the last few years we have been gaining some recognition through hard work, through the support of interested people who have been able to help us. Some of you standing in this room have been able to give us assistance in one way or another.

I assure you that we are not anti-development. I want to assure you that we will work with any authority, but we have to do so with our full participation, we have to do so with our full, free and informed consent for all activities that are going to take place in and around our areas. We have to think about our children that are coming up. We have to think about the future of Amerindians in Guyana. Like any other ethnic group, we can contribute to the development of Guyana as long as we are given the chance, as long as you are willing to listen to us.

You will agree that we take time in making decisions, our decisions are not made at one time. We have to consult, we have to speak with people, we have to speak with the spirits so that they can give us advice, so that they can give us the right direction. It is important and I feel honored right here that this is a history making event. The spirits are turning and will continue to turn, they are turning in all directions. I want to assure you that the direction we are going to take is to assist in the development of our country and the development of the Amerindian nations of Guyana.

I see a bright future for our people once were are consulted and respected. I see something on the horizon for our people as long as we can work together. We are willing to work. A lot of people have shown that they are willing to listen to us. The Prime Minister who I have had several meetings with is a man that I admire for being very patient, for listening to us, giving us not only one side of his ears, but both of his ears. I feel real honored and I want to thank the spirits for giving me the strength and courage to stand here in front of you. I leave tomorrow to go back to my people and I have good news for them. Thank you.

March 24, 2000

"Tell people in your land that we're going to take care of this area, so others don't destroy it." Akâ Panará



Photo credit: André Villas Boas - Panará Leader Akâ

In March 2000, Rainforest Foundation Program Coordinator, Christine Halvorson visited the Panará along with Steve Schwartzman (Environmental Defense Fund), David Cleary (The Nature Conservancy), Marcio Santilli and André Villas-Bôas (Socio-Environmental Institute) to discuss the main issues facing the group that returned to their homelands following a 25 year exile in the Xingu National Park.

Brought back from the brink of cultural extinction, the Rainforest Foundation is continuing to honor its commitment made in 1993 to this group which it helped return home. In the coming year the Rainforest Foundation will begin to work toward strategies for the long-term sustainable occupation of the area by the Panará.



Project News

The Panará Face the Future

The Panará are a community that continues to take unprecedented steps in the history of the Indigenous peoples of Brazil.

Known as the Krenakarore in the 1970's, when they were first contacted by Brazilian society, the Panará were victims of irresponsible development policies implemented by the Brazilian government to occupy the Amazon region. These policies led the Panará to near extinction, reducing the population to a total of 78 individuals. Transferred from their traditional territory in order to be protected, the Panará lived in exile in the Xingu Park for over 20 years. In the early 1990s, after a long period of not adapting to conditions in the Xingu, the Panará took the bold decision to return to their old territory.

Statement by Akâ Panará Nacypotire, March 16, 2000

Starting in the beginning, we were all where Matupá is, by the road – white people from Funai were there, giving us sugar, manioc flour, etc. But all the Panará were dieing. [Funai agent] Fiorello Parise came. He brought people to the Xingu, and they said there were people there. So we all went to the Xingu. But people were still dying. So we moved to a Txucurramãe village – and a lot of people continued to die.

Claudio Villas-Bôas came, and took us to Diauarum. We lived for a while in Prepore's village. People died there too. A Suya chief asked us to plant gardens near his, so we did. Then I had the idea that the Panará should have our own village. So we found a place of abandoned old Kayabi gardens, but people died there too. So we looked for a new place, down river. Some people, including me, said we should go to the Panará area, to see, but others wouldn't let us. So we made a village down-river.

We were down-river, and I was very sad. Two of my wives died, and one grandchild, and others. I was very sad, and angry, when my son died. So I said "we have to find a new village, where we can live, not die". I said we should go back to our land, see if the forest had really died, had been cut down. That's where the idea really started.

We looked all over in the Xingu Park for a place with good forest. But there's no açaí, no cacao, other fruits, no forest rich in animals, with a lot of monkeys. But we made a village on the Arrães River. That's when Señ [anthropologist Stephan Schwartzman of EDF] and André [Villas Boas, of ISA] came, and we flew over this area (Nacypotire). On our land, there's lots of açaí, cacao, and other fruits. There are a lot of animals. And that's how it was that we came back here. This isn't my river, though. My river is over there*.

I don't know what will happen in the future. It's the children who will know. I'll have been dead a long time by then. But I think the Panará are going to stay here, in this area forever. It will grow and there will be many Panará. I don't know where they'll live, but there will be many villages, and they will stay here, in this area.

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* Akâ refers to the area where he was born; a grove of Brazil-nut trees, in what is now the middle of Guarantã, a small town. This area, as well as a large portion of the Panará's traditional land (two thirds), was devastated by mining and ranching, and was therefore not included in the final demarcation. The Panará Indigenous Park covers 1.1 million acres of rainforest



Returning to their land has been a long and slow process, which has required enormous efforts by the Panará, and was made possible with support of the Rainforest Foundation-US, the Environmental Defense Fund, and the Socio-environmental Institute. In 1996, the Brazilian government officially recognized the traditional land of the Panará. By 1997, the entire Panará population, which today counts 200 individuals, had moved to their land, a nearly 2,000 square-mile area located between the counties of Guarantã and Altamira in the states of Mato Grosso and Pará. This area represents only a part of the forest land they traditionally occupied; the remainder had been devastated by gold mining and ranching interests.

Throughout this process, the Panará demonstrated enormous cultural strength, essential to rebuild the necessary conditions for future sustainability. The Panará case also gave rise to a series of unprecedented initiatives in Brazilian Indigenous policy. Like the Panará, other Indigenous peoples in Brazil have suffered similar disrespect of their basic rights – many have not been successful in resisting, and have simply disappeared. In addition to having demonstrated that it is possible to fight for the reclamation of their rights and to reconquer at least part of the land that had been taken from them, the Panará have also created a precedent, by suing the Brazilian government for damages caused by the loss of family members and suffering endured during uncontrolled contact and their subsequent exile in the Xingu. In doing so, the Panará are setting an important legal precedent that will benefit other Indigenous groups which have faced similar circumstances.

The Panará have faced new challenges related to the current regional context. The region in which their re-conquered land is situated, as is the case of other areas in Amazônia, is characterized by disputes over the indiscriminate and illegal appropriation of public lands and the natural resources on them, above all timber resources. The physical demarcation of their land has still not been finalized, which means that conflicts over the borders of their land still take place. These should disappear once the demarcation is fully completed and all the borders properly demarcated and protected.

There is a tremendous amount of interest in the timber on Panará land, which has been a source of permanent upheaval for the Panará. The situation has demanded enormous monitoring efforts, mainly on the areas rich in mahogany. The presence and actions of relevant government entities have not been sufficient to restrain logging activities in the region, making the permanent mobilization of the Panará fundamental to the protection of their land and natural resources. The Panará have also had to maintain a permanent infrastructure for the monitoring of their land, with support from their partner organizations.

Currently the Panará are living a process of cultural revitalization. They have renewed their calendar of ceremonies and are taking on the activities that traditionally reaffirm their identity as a people. The population is growing back to the levels of before contact. However, they now face the question of their economic sustainability – one of the major paradigms facing Indigenous peoples in the Amazon today. How can a micro society, with a subsistence-level economic tradition and poor command of the national language, interact commercially with our society in order to satisfy its need for goods, without bringing about the predatory exploration of its natural resources or pulling apart its social and cultural fabric? A magic formula doesn't exist to answer this question. One thing is for certain, however: any solution must consider the cultural, social, and environmental particularities of each group.

For the Panará, this question is gaining more and more importance, now that they are more stable, after having returned to their traditional land. To resolve this dilemma, the Panará will need to keep fighting, and find partners who are truly interested in helping them build viable economic alternatives.

The pace of events involving the Panará has certainly quickened since they came to live in contact with our society. However, the Panará are warriors, and as such, face each new challenge as if their survival as a people were at stake. In this, perhaps, lies the strength and resistance of the Panará.

André Villas-Bôas
Socio-Environmental Institute (ISA),
São Paulo, Brazil

BRAZIL 500 Year Anniversary, RF-US Supports Indigenous Peoples' Protest March

April 22, 2000 marked the 500-year anniversary of the 'discovery' of Brazil. Brazil's Indigenous peoples chose to protest rather than celebrate the event, considering it to mark the passing of five centuries of physical and cultural genocide. In collaboration with other social movements, Indigenous groups decided to counter government celebrations with a cross-country march and a gathering on the shores of Bahia, where the Portuguese first landed.



Photo credit: Carlos Humberto TDC/RF2

Caravans from across Brazil arrived in Bahia to participate in a historic Indigenous Conference on April 19 and 22. Following the Conference, over 2000 marchers traveled to Porto Seguro, where Government celebrations were also planned. On the morning of the 22nd, the Indigenous March started on its way into Porto Seguro, where the commemorations and protest were to be held. The peaceful protest was met with anti-riot military police using tear gas, concussion grenades and rubber bullets. Some 30 people were injured. Another 30 were arrested. The aftermath of this repression is still unclear.

The Indigenous peoples of Brazil continue to grow and organize, 500 years after Cabral first landed. They have wrought significant gains, in the demarcation of land, respect for their rights, and building of international solidarity. Unfortunately, these gains are too often only on paper. Indigenous lands are routinely invaded by loggers, miners and ranchers. Major infrastructure development projects threaten not only the forest but the peoples who live there. Indigenous peoples therefore took advantage of the anniversary of the 'discovery' of Brazil to come together to demand their rights and present their proposals for the future. They also gave the world a chance to learn about the struggles they have faced, the victories they have won, and the challenges still ahead.

INDIGENOUS CONFERENCE DEMANDS

Following are some of the main points from the final document resulting from the conference in Bahia. The full document contains 20 demands and proposals regarding Indigenous rights, land, education, and health care.

"We arrived in the Pataxó village of Coroa Vermelha on April 17, 2000. On our way to the village, we fulfilled our commitment to follow the trail of the great invasion of our territories, which has lasted 500 years now. We are more than 3,000 representatives of 140 Indigenous peoples from all over Brazil. We have crossed land, rivers, mountains, valleys and plains once inhabited by our ancestors. Filled with emotion, we saw the regions where Indigenous peoples were once the masters of their own future. Filled with emotion, we saw the regions were Indigenous people were killed defending land invaded by explorers, adventurers, miners and, later on, by roads, farms, and business, craving land, profit and power.

We marched in remembrance of our struggle and pain, to reclaim our history and help build a positive future for all Indigenous peoples…

Continued...

As an organization, we rely on contributions from individuals and corporations to undertake our work.

To donate to our work, please send a check made payable to the Rainforest Foundation and mail to 270 Lafayette Street, #1107, New York, NY 10012. Your donation will help make a difference.

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BRAZIL 500 Year Anniversary, Indigenous Peoples March in Protest

INDIGENOUS CONFERENCE DEMANDS

Continued from inside...

Our main demands and proposals are the following:

• Assurance of the Indigenous rights provided for in the Federal Constitution, including demarcation and full protection of all Indigenous lands, and appropriate health care and education for Indigenous peoples;

• Immediate approval of Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization (ILO);

• Passage of the Indigenous Statute currently being reviewed by National Congress, as approved by Indigenous peoples and organizations (Bill 2.057/91); [debates on the Statute are scheduled for June]

• The end of discrimination, removal by force of Indigenous people from their lands, massacres, threats against Indigenous leaders, violence and impunity in any form. Immediate investigation of all crimes committed against Indigenous people in the last 20 years and punishment of the guilty ones. We demand respect for our culture, traditions, languages, and for the religions of the different Indigenous peoples of Brazil."...

Coroa Vermelha, Bahia, 21 April 2000.

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Front & Back Cover Header Photo: Ricardo Funari/RF2 - Indigenous Peoples' Conference and March.

Inside Header Photo: Per Fronth -River Bank

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How You can Help Protect Wild Forests in the US

US Congress is to determine the fate of over 60 million acres of roadless national forest areas this fall. A public comment process is being carried out by the US Forest Service to weigh opinion on the initiative. We encourage you to participate in the process by writing to the Forest Service at the address below, urging the full protection of these last large tracts of wild lands in the United States.

The Clinton Administration has proposed a Wild Forest Protection Plan, which would protect roadless areas – National Forests of over 1,000 acres – from road-building and commercial exploitation, such as logging and mining. The Forest Service has proposed alternatives, which would allow for logging and mining, and is currently holding public hearings on the issue. Their proposal would also not include the Tongass National Forest in Alaska, the largest temperate rainforest on earth. According to the Sierra Club, only 1-2% of wild forests remains in the US. This is a good chance to help protect them.

The underlying ecological and social issues at stake in this situation are the same as those faced in Latin America. The Rainforest Foundation is therefore joining a broad range of activists and organizations here in the US to encourage you to support the protection of wild forests – including Tongass – through the roadless area initiative. For more information, please contact the Sierra Club at 1-800-OURLAND or visit our website: www.savetherest.org.

USDA Forest Service-CAET, Attn: Roadless, PO Box 221090,Salt Lake City, UT 84122 Fax: 877 703 2494, roadless@fs.fed.us

For More information...

To learn more about the Rainforest Foundation's projects throughout Central and South America contact us at 212 431 9098

The Rainforest Foundation is an organization with offices in four countries and projects in 18 countries spanning the globe. Our work is only made possible with the continued generosity of its supporters.

Our mission to support indigenous and traditional populations of the rainforest in their efforts to protect their environment and fulfill their rights will be carried on until we succeed.

Please visit us at www.savetherest.org

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