

UN Rapporteur says Bolsonaro is responsible for suffering in the Amazon



United Nations, August 3 (RHC)-- The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Victoria Tauli-Corpuz said Friday that Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro is directly responsible for the suffering of the Wajapi indigenous people and the subsequent murder of its leader, Emyra Wajapi, on July 22nd.

"In practice, every time Bolsonaro fosters economic exploitation of indigenous lands through his speeches, he grants a free pass to economic and political interests wishing to exploit them," Tauli-Corpuz said. "Bolsonaro is directly responsible because the government has the responsibility of protecting its citizens' lives. And Brazil has signed all international human rights conventions."

In the Amazon basin, about 1,300 Wajapis have been traditionally living in a protected territory which is rich in iron, copper and gold. According to Brazilian law, these indigenous people are the only economic agent authorized to exploit gold in a sustainable way in their territory.

However, on several occasions, the far-right former captain who became president has called on the private sector to "exploit" the mineral resources of the Amazon.

"Portugal: the Left denounces the assassination of the indigenous leader Emyra Wajapi. Impeachment of Bolsonaro." The meme reads, "Amazon: the village invasion and the indigenous leader murder make us fear a new massacre. Emyra Wajapi was a leader with a historic struggle for the demarcation of indigenous lands. Since a group of miners invaded their village, indigenous people have been living in an environment of terror."

In statements to journalists made on July 29, for instance, Bolsonaro said that indigenous reserves "are preventing" the development of the country and that his intention is to "regularize mining" activities.

Besides asking the Brazilian authorities to investigate the death of the indigenous leader, Tauli-Corpuz demanded that the perpetrators be brought to justice.

Referring to the investigation of the murder of Emyra Wajapi, Tauli-Corpuz stressed that there are "inconsistencies" in the pronouncements made by various Brazilian officials. She also criticized Bolsonaro for questioning the participation of business groups in the murder of Emyra Wajapi.

"At this time, it is irresponsible to say that [the murder] was not carried out by interest groups. Who killed him? The indigenous themselves? Holding that is an extravagance," the UN Special Rapporteur stressed.

Tauli-Corpuz believes that, amid the ongoing negotiations of the European Union-Mercosur Free Trade Agreement, consumers of Brazilian meat products and soybeans should exert pressure in favor of the rights of indigenous peoples. "Generally speaking, Europe is very concerned with climate change and biodiversity conservation, which means that the [EU] can take into account environmental and human rights concerns at the negotiations for the ratification of the agreement."

According to Thomas Waitz, a member of the Greens-European Free Alliance, the EU-Mercosur FTA will have a lot of resistance in the EU Parliament because climate change and the defense of biodiversity are at the center of the political debate.

"The issue of climate change has affected all parties ... Everyone is aware that something must be done," he said and added that "I doubt that the FTA will get a majority in the European Parliament."

Juan Lopez de Uralde, a lawmaker and former Greenpeace leader in Spain, also argues that the EU "cannot stand idly by what is happening" in Brazil. "The Amazon is a global lung of great importance for climate stability. Europe cannot look the other way," Lopez de Uralde said and stressed that "Bolsonaro's statements and policies are an invitation to the destruction of the Amazon."

For the Survival research director, Fiona Watson, human rights defenders must raise awareness among European consumers of the crimes that are happening at the Amazon rainforest.

"If countries consuming Brazilian meat and soy are clear that these products are often made at the cost of losing lives or deforesting the Amazon, they will stop buying them," Watson said and added that Bolsonaro represents "the greatest threat to Latin American indigenous peoples since the dictatorship."

When the military ruled Brazil between 1964 and 1985, attempts were made to "integrate" indigenous peoples into society to benefit the economic status quo. In the same way, nowadays, Bolsonaro seeks that "indigenous lands be released in order to become exploited in agriculture and mining" activities, Watson explained.

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