

Brazilian government actions in favor of the Yanomami people



By María Josefina Arce

The images went around the world last year and shocked Brazilian society and the international community. The Yanomami people were slowly dying. The serious food and health situation had already caused numerous deaths, especially among the infant population of Brazil's largest indigenous ethnic group.

Nearly 600 children under the age of five died from preventable causes in the four years in office of the ultra-right-wing Jair Bolsonaro, who left this community to its fate and encouraged illegal mining, which led to a humanitarian tragedy.

The Yanomami fought a fierce battle for their survival. Illegal gold prospectors not only killed members of this ethnic group, but their activity destroyed part of their territory and polluted rivers with mercury.

And still fresh in the memory of many the images that showed the world the genocide committed against this people, a study showed that about 99 percent (%) of the inhabitants of nine Yanomami villages in the Brazilian Amazon have high levels of mercury contamination.

Developed by the state-owned Oswaldo Cruz Foundation, the research revealed that 84% of the samples showed contamination levels of this toxic metal higher than two micrograms, twice the rate considered critical by the World Health Organization.

The study, the results of which were made public in the last few days, specified that the highest level of mercury contamination was found in the villages closest to areas of illegal mining.

The precarious situation of this indigenous community, which extends through the Brazilian states of Roraima and Amazonas, triggered an immediate response from the government of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, shortly after he assumed the presidency.

The authorities opened an investigation for genocide, sent food and health personnel and undertook the expulsion of some 20,000 illegal miners.

One year later, the situation continued to be complex in the Yanomami territory. Hence, last January, the government announced an exceptional budget of some 240 million dollars for the protection of this community, which will be permanent.

A month later, the Government House was constituted in Roraima, a federal body whose objective is to coordinate actions to face the crisis and which includes, among others, the construction of an indigenous hospital in Boa Vista, for medium and high complexity specialized care services.

The Brazilian president has emphasized that the indigenous issue and the problems of the Yanomami people are a State matter, as evidenced by the actions developed in recent months by the government over which he presides.

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