

Violence targeting Indigenous people surges 61 percent in Brazil

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Land invasions in Brazilian Indigenous territories rose 137 percent last year, a rights group reported

Brasilia, October 29 (RHC)-- Violence against Indigenous people in Brazil surged by more than 60 percent last year, a rights group has said, as land invasions of Indigenous territories increased and the government failed to provide protection.

In its annual report, released on Thursday, on violence against the descendants of Brazil's original inhabitants, the Catholic Church's Indigenous Missionary Council (CIMI) said there were 182 murders of

Indigenous people in 2020, compared with 113 murders in 2019, a 61 percent increase.

The report blamed the government of far-right President Jair Bolsonaro for failing to protect Indigenous communities, while pushing legislation that would open their reservations to commercial mining, oil and gas exploration and the building of hydroelectric dams.

Last year, Bolsonaro's government saw "the deepening of an extremely worrying scenario in terms of Indigenous rights, territories and lives," the report said. Indigenous land claims have also been paralysed under the Bolsonaro administration, the report said. Of 1,289 reservations in Brazil, 832 are waiting for official recognition.

The Brazilian president recently visited an Indigenous territory and defended illegal mining which has an "enormous impact on the environment and Indigenous people", Cesar Munoz, Americas senior researcher at Human Rights Watch, said Thursday on Twitter.

Bolsonaro has previously praised US army cavalry colonel George Armstrong Custer for clearing Indigenous people from the plains of North America. He has also criticized reservations for occupying valuable land and has said he will not grant another inch of land claimed by Indigenous communities. He is backed by powerful farm interests, as part of a group of lawmakers known informally in Brazil as the "beef, Bibles and bullets" bloc.

Critics have said that Bolsonaro's comments have emboldened illegal miners, squatters, and loggers, whose invasions of reservation territories have exacerbated the spread of the coronavirus.

More than 800 Indigenous people in Brazil have died from COVID-19, according to official figures that only count deaths on reservations and not among Indigenous people in Brazil's cities. Brazil has a population of 900,000 Indigenous people, of which one third have moved off reservations to urban areas.

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