

Bolsonaro's irresponsible bet on mining in the Amazon

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Illegal mining has grown at a dizzying pace under Bolsonaro. Photo: Reuters

By María Josefina Arce

In 2021, the government of the ultra-right-wing Jair Bolsonaro has approved at least seven mining projects in some of the most protected areas of the Amazon, which environmental organizations estimate is suffering irreversible destruction due to increasing deforestation, caused by various activities such as the extraction of minerals, mainly gold.

But the Brazilian president has minimized and described the alarming reality as nonsense, and has always encouraged mining, which damages the environment of these areas, despite the fact that it is prohibited by law.

Article 176 of the country's Constitution prohibits any extractive activity on indigenous lands. However, the government's stance has led to hundreds of applications for mineral exploitation in these areas.

And the truth is that this activity always causes changes in the places where it is developed. Experts point out that it is accompanied by damage, whether to the soil, water resources, vegetation or the surrounding population.

Moreover, opinion polls reveal that the majority of Brazilians reject Bolsonaro's policy on the exploitation of indigenous lands. Eighty-six percent do not agree with the opening of these areas to mining.

Already, illegal mining, which under Bolsonaro has grown at a dizzying pace, has caused catastrophic deforestation, as well as pollution and the murder of indigenous people defending their territories.

The data do not lie. Between August 2020 and July of this year, the largest tropical rainforest on the planet lost 13,235 square kilometers of vegetation cover. That is the largest area degraded for a 12-month period in the last 15 years.

Now these projects will be carried out within protected areas, on indigenous and conservation lands, where the highest indigenous density is located. Seventy-six percent of its population is made up of indigenous peoples.

During his electoral campaign and after assuming the presidency in January 2019, Bolsonaro made clear his interest in favoring mining. His government, in conjunction with the rural caucus in Congress and mining companies seeks to accelerate several bills to change environmental protection regulations.

At the last UN Conference on climate change, held last November in the Scottish city of Glasgow, Bolsonaro's government promised to eliminate illegal deforestation in the Amazon by 2028.

The president's actions, however, call this commitment into question. The truth is that so far he has only shown that he has neglected his responsibility to protect the Amazon, as economic interests have been more important than preserving life.

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