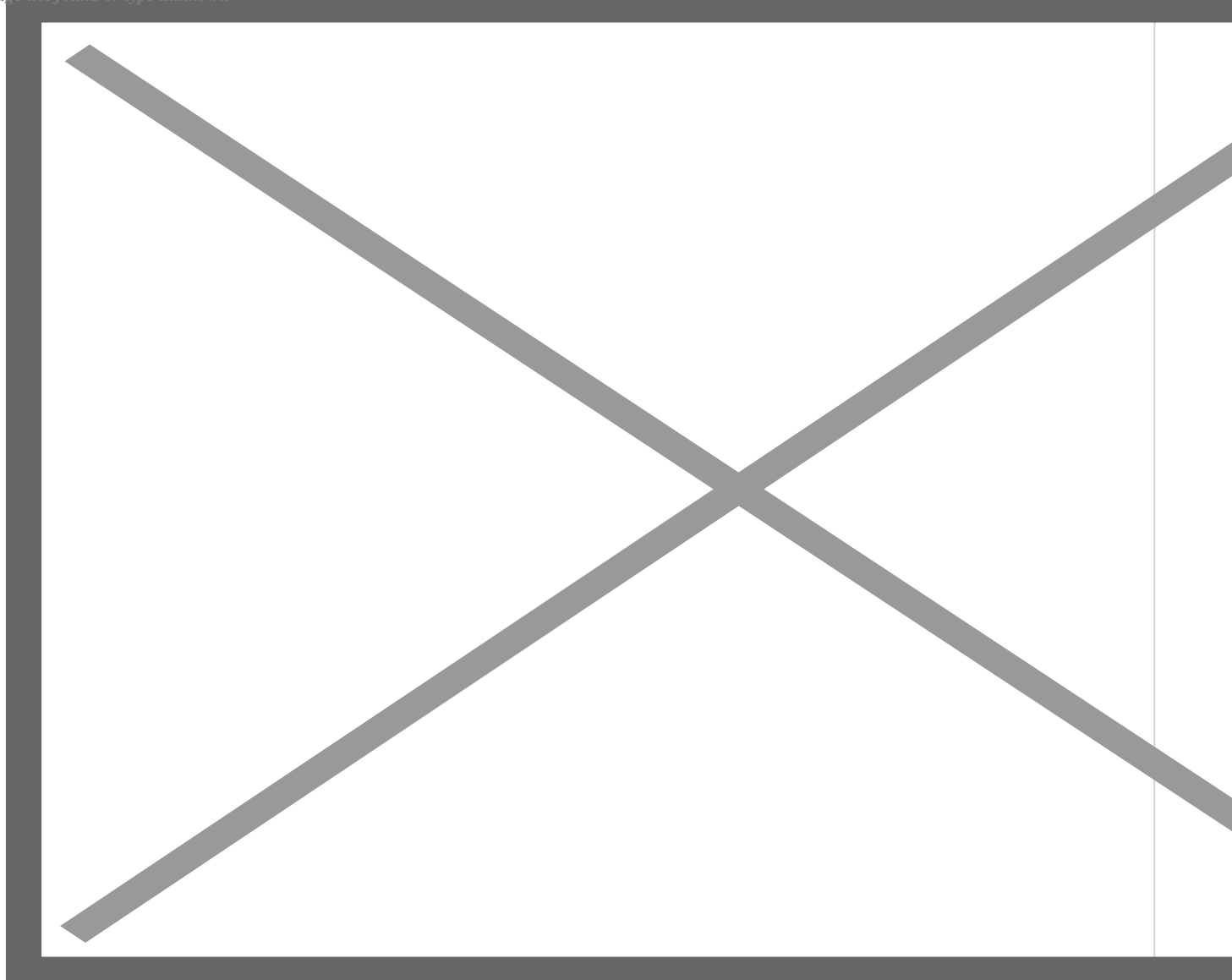


Protecting indigenous peoples is commitment of Brazilian government

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The images have shaken Brazilian society. They seem to have been taken in a World War II concentration camp. But the features of the people in them reveal that they are members of indigenous communities living in the South American nation.

By María Josefina Arce

The images have shaken Brazilian society. They seem to have been taken in a World War II concentration camp. But the features of the people in them reveal that they are members of indigenous communities living in the South American nation.

Hunger and curable diseases are killing the Yanomami. Testimonies from doctors and health care personnel who have traveled to the area in recent days attest to the horror of the situation, which even President Luiz Inácio Lula Da Silva called genocide.

It is the result of the total abandonment of this and other indigenous ethnic groups during the four-year term of office of Jair Bolsonaro, who always expressed his total disdain for the native peoples.

In that period of time about 600 Yanomami children have died of malaria, pneumonia and malnutrition. According to indigenous organizations, more than half of the population of this ethnic group is ill.

Located in the states of Amazonas and Roraima, close to the Venezuelan border, Yanomami Land is the largest indigenous reserve in Brazil, which has been subject in recent years to an increase in the invasion of illegal miners, encouraged by the discourse of the previous tenant of the Planalto Palace.

In fact over many years, even before becoming president in 2019, Bolsonaro made multiple offensive statements against indigenous peoples and already encouraged the usurpation of their territories. In 2015 he stated, "There is no indigenous land that does not contain minerals. There is gold, tin and magnesium in those lands, especially in the Amazon, the richest area in the world. I don't enter into this frame-up of defending the land for the Indian."

The result is that this extractive activity has destroyed flora and fauna, polluted rivers and soils with mercury, used to separate the ore, in addition to the fact that miners have spread diseases among the inhabitants of that region, who have a low immunity due to their limited contact with other people.

Bolsonaro weakened environmental policies and the protection of indigenous peoples. He also ignored dozens of letters requesting his help in the critical situation of the Yanomami.

But the new government headed by Lula Da Silva, who traveled to Roraima in recent days, has turned its attention to the lamentable panorama and has immediately mobilized to assist this community. He declared a state of public health emergency in the area, and began sending medical aid and food to the indigenous people and transferring the sick to health centers.

Likewise, it determined the opening of an investigation for crimes and genocide against the Yanomami, and at the same time dismissed more than 50 public officials of SENSA, the Indigenous Health Secretariat, and FUNAI, the National Foundation of Indigenous Peoples.

From now on, the agencies, previously headed by the military, will be headed by representatives of the native communities, while FUNAI will be part of the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples, created by Lula and headed by Sonia Guajajara, one of the most representative voices of the indigenous movement.

The new executive has been quick to respond to the lamentable situation faced by the Yanomami, which speaks for itself of its commitment to the native peoples, source of knowledge and guardians of the environment and, therefore, of life on the planet.

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