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# Brazil threatens indigenous lands

Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro has adopted anti-environmental measures for the Amazon since taking office in January 2019 (1), and deforestation pressures are increasing with plans for expanding plantations of soy and other export crops (including biofuels) and for building new roads, dams, and mines (1, 2). On 6 February 2020, Bolsonaro submitted a bill to Brazil's National Congress that would open indigenous lands for mining, extraction of oil and gas, and construction of hydroelectric dams, cattle ranches, and mechanized monocultures such as soy (3). Indigenous leaders would be allowed to rent tribal land to non-indigenous agribusiness entrepreneurs (3). The bill would allow mining in indigenous lands without authorization from their indigenous inhabitants (3). This bill, if passed, would violate the rights of indigenous peoples and threaten the environment.

The Brazilian Society for the Progress of Science (SBPC) organized a public seminar at the National Institute of Amazonian Research (INPA) to discuss the risks the bill poses to Amazonia (4), and an open letter was drafted by the organizers alerting civil society and decision makers to the bill's violation of Brazilian legislation and ILO Convention 169, which require free, prior, and informed consultation of indigenous peoples affected by actions such as this (5). The right to consultation has been routinely ignored by large enterprises in the Amazon, putting many traditional peoples at risk (6).

Bolsonaro's desire to open indigenous lands to agribusiness and mining has often been expressed in his extemporaneous remarks and social media posts. Early in his term of office, a visit by his ministers of agriculture and environment to an illegal soy plantation in an indigenous land signaled impunity for violations of current legal restrictions (1). The proposed law now makes the threat imminent. The administration's discourse is credited with invasions of indigenous lands and killings of indigenous leaders reaching record levels in 2019 (7). *Garimpeiros* (illegal "wildcat" goldminers) are a constant threat to indigenous lands, and their impact will now be even greater thanks to the proposed law and to COVID-19. President Bolsonaro has repeatedly expressed support for these invaders. On 14 April 2020 his environment minister dismissed one of the directors of the environmental agency as punishment for having ordered the removal of *garimpeiros* from an indigenous land (8). Demarcated indigenous lands represent 24% of Brazil's Amazon biome, thus protecting more than the 14% that is in federal "conservation units" (protected areas for biodiversity) (9). Indigenous lands act as shields protecting traditional peoples, biodiversity, carbon stocks, and ecosystem services. Destruction of these forested areas poses a risk to the entire planet, as it affects one of the world's largest carbon stocks (10). We urge the president of Brazil's Chamber of Deputies not to put this bill to a vote, and we encourage Brazil's Supreme Court to act quickly to protect the country's Indigenous peoples.

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