



## **PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE DISTRIBUTION**

As the new forest fire season moves forward, the situation of extreme vulnerability of Indigenous Peoples in Isolation becomes critical, warns an international group of organizations.

The Trinational Report: Fires and Deforestation in Territories with Records of Indigenous Peoples in Isolation, presented today, launches an international alert on the serious situation faced by indigenous peoples in isolation and provides recommendations for the implementation of protection measures for these peoples and their territories.

Wednesday, August 26, 2020. More than twenty indigenous and civil society organizations, which are part of the International Working Group on Indigenous Peoples in Isolation and Initial Contact in the Amazon, Gran Chaco and Brazilian Cerrado (GTI PIACI), launched today an international alert on the threat posed by forest fires and deforestation to Indigenous Peoples living in Isolation in the regions of the Amazon, the Great American Chaco and Brazilian Cerrado, in Bolivia, Brazil and Paraguay.

During 2019, these regions suffered dramatic increases in the incidence of forest fires and deforestation, a scenario that begins to repeat itself in 2020 as fires once again spread throughout the Amazon and the Great American Chaco. This situation aggravates the condition of extreme vulnerability of Indigenous Peoples living in Isolation, since fires and deforestation destroy the territories where they live, where they develop their culture, and which provide their means of subsistence.

The Trinational Report: Fires and Deforestation in Territories with Records of Indigenous Peoples in Isolation, presented today at a virtual press conference, draws attention to the serious situation faced by indigenous peoples in isolation, and presents recommendations for States, multilateral organizations, and civil society in these countries, with the aim of implementing urgent protection measures for these peoples and their territories.

**“The daily life of indigenous peoples in isolation is marked by numerous threats that place them, for the most part, in a situation of constant mobilization and despair. The voracious increase in forest fires and deforestation aggravates their situation and renders them increasingly vulnerable”, explained Antenor Vaz, lead author of the Report and**

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**consultant to Land is Life, the organization currently holding the secretariat of the GTI PIACI.**

For the preparation of this report, Vaz and his colleagues from Brazil, Bolivia and Paraguay carried out an analysis of the serious events that occurred during 2019 in vast regions of the Amazon, the Great American Chaco and Brazilian Cerrado with the use of maps, georeferenced information and direct testimonies. Following a collaborative methodology, in which representatives of various indigenous peoples participated as protagonists, the researchers analyzed information from a total of 99 indigenous territories with records of indigenous peoples in Bolivia, Brazil and Paraguay, which allowed them to verify the vertiginous increase of hot spots in 2019 compared to 2018. In such a period, these hotspots grew 258% in Bolivia, 259% in Brazil, and 185% in Paraguay. Likewise, the hot spots detected in the 32 conservation units (protected areas) with presence of Indigenous Peoples Living in Isolation increased by 744.38% in Bolivia, 347.87% in Brazil, and 44.15% in Paraguay.

The Trinational Report is based on local reports prepared, respectively, by the Coordinator of Indigenous Organizations of the Brazilian Amazon (COIAB) in Brazil, the Amotocodie Initiative (IA) in Paraguay, and the Central Indígena de Comunidades Tacana II del Río Madre de Dios (CITRMD) in Bolivia.

**“In addition to all the impacts caused by colonization, in 2019 the indigenous peoples in isolation in Bolivia, Brazil, and Paraguay were subjected to an unprecedented wave of fires and deforestation in their territories, which demands solutions that are impossible to address under the sole focus of local and international regulations established for indigenous peoples with a history of contact”, explained Vaz, the report’s lead author.**

The Report also highlights that the common denominator for the increase in forest fires is human action, driven by expansionary practices of agribusinesses and extractive industries. This, coupled with the lack of effective regulatory frameworks for the protection of Indigenous Peoples living in Isolation, makes the latter’s situation increasingly precarious.

**“The loss of territory caused by deforestation and fires leads the people to displacement in search of safer places, and this brings with it other dangers: involuntary proximity to neighbouring populations and possible contagion of disease. The situation is further complicated by the presence of Covid-19, whose exponential growth puts the lives of these peoples, as well as the living heritage of the Americas and of humanity, at serious risk”, the Report concludes.**

Bolivia’s Local Report presents findings on State actions promoting the expansion of the agricultural frontier without an accompanying conservation policy. In the words of Adamo Diego Cusi, researcher and activist, representative of the Takana people and author of the Report on Indigenous Peoples in Isolation and Forest Fires in Bolivia, “there are laws in Bolivia that promote the expansion of agribusiness and the agricultural frontier, without considering the negative effects that this has on indigenous peoples and the environment. As a result, fires are increasingly aggressive and their consequences devastating.”

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According to this report, 6.4 million hectares were burned in Bolivia in 2019, of which 94% were lowlands, located for the most part in the departments of Santa Cruz (65%) and Beni (29%), in the Bolivian Amazon Basin. In addition, it was reported that the same year, 36 indigenous territories were affected by forest fires, with a total of 226,714 hectares burned.

The same report states that the hot spots and forest fires in indigenous territories and protected areas have permeated the lives of Indigenous Peoples living in Isolation. In general, forest fires in 2019 exceeded historical records since 2010, and any effective response to the fires was overwhelmed. Moreover, in two Absolute Reserves for Indigenous Peoples living in Isolation (in process) and 16 indigenous and peasant territories with records of Indigenous Peoples in Isolation, there was presence of 36,034 hot spots.

In the case of Brazil, the local report describes the criminal organization of various groups of farmers that clear large areas of forest, which creates forest fires and increases the agricultural frontier. This is undertaken as a way to continue the expansion of agribusiness and extractive industries. The government of current president Jair Bolsonaro, has shown from its beginnings to be favorable to opening up the Amazon forests to various forms of exploitation and resource extraction.

**“Contrary to the position taken by the State and the farmers, for whom razing the forest is a form of development, various peoples have organized themselves and formed teams of indigenous firefighters who fight to protect the forests that are their home”, said Kleber Karipuna, an indigenous leader of the Karipuna people and representative of the Coordinating Body of Indigenous Organizations of the Brazilian Amazon (COIAB), who is also one of the authors of the Brazilian local report.**

The total active fire rate on indigenous land with records of Indigenous Peoples Living in Isolation was 31,438 outbreaks, and only two indigenous lands had no active fire detection inland: Pirititi, in Roraima, and TI Tanaru, in Rondônia.

The land with the highest density of fires was Inawebohona, located in the Tocantins, with more than 8,199 outbreaks, which corresponds approximately to the sum of the total fires in the next two lands with the most detections: Yanomami (4,652) and Xingu Park (4,169).

With regard to criminal fires, these are carried out especially during the period of drought, when the severity of damage to biodiversity can be much greater and result in environmental degradation.

**“Considering that Indigenous Peoples living in Isolation depend exclusively on the natural resources existing in their territories, the advance of fire and the consequent negative impact on native species is worrisome. Furthermore, in some cases, the incidence of fires brings with it the presence of large teams of combat forces, sometimes unprepared to deal with the sighting of Indigenous Peoples living in Isolation. These occurrences can promote situations of contact, contagion of diseases and violence”, concluded the Brazilian Report.**

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Paraguay's Local Report, prepared by the Amotocodie Initiative (IA), presents important accounts by Ayoreo Indians of the effects of fires on Indigenous Peoples living in Isolation (IAP).

**Given this devastating panorama for Indigenous Peoples living in Isolation, the International Working Group on Indigenous Peoples living in Isolation and Initial Contact in the Amazon and the Gran Chaco proposes the following recommendations:**

**To support and increase the initiatives of indigenous peoples with a history of contact in:**

- Strengthening and training of "indigenous brigades" for fire fighting and prevention.
- Strengthening territorial self-protection mechanisms such as the Forest Guardians, who, of their own free will, organize collectively to protect their territories.

**That by 2020, multilateral organizations urge the Bolivian, Brazilian and Paraguayan States to:**

- Establish an emergency legal framework, and in cooperation with indigenous and related organizations, preventive and fire-extinguishing programs in territories with the presence of Indigenous Peoples living in Isolation.
- Urgently constitute, through their competent institutions, a working group that defines and implements a plan for the protection of territories with a register of Indigenous Peoples living in Isolation, in order to remove all invaders who are occupying these territories.
- Urge States to develop plans to prevent fires in 2020, considering the numerous records of IPAs in this cross-border region of South America, where fires pass from one country to another, as is the case of Bolivia and Paraguay.

**To recommend the Legislative Chambers of Bolivia, Brazil and Paraguay:**

- The proposal of a National Policy on Integrated Fire Management that includes a Plan to Prevent and Combat Deforestation in the Amazon, the Great American Chaco and Cerrado.

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