

Report reveals Brazilian president's hate speech encourages 150% increase in tribal land invasions



Brasilia, March 4 (RHC)-- Ten days after Brazil's right-wing President Jair Bolsonaro took office, witnesses say dozens of men invaded protected Indigenous land in a remote corner of the Amazon, to claim their stake on indigenous people's land.

Encouraged by Bolsonaro's vow to open more native territory to commercial encroachment, the men, armed with machetes, chainsaws, and firearms, had come to stake their claims, Reuters reported. The trespassers threatened to set fire to their villages to drive them out, according to tribal members.

The invaders retreated but they threatened to come back. "It was a warning that they are coming back," said Awip Puré Uru-eu-wau-wau, a 19-year-old tribal member whose land was invaded. Land invasions have reportedly increased 150 percent since Bolsonaro was elected in late October, according to the Indigenous Missionary Council (CIMI), a Brazilian advocacy group.

Brazil is home to nearly 850,000 Indigenous people representing roughly 300 tribes. Their vast reservations, accounting for about 13 percent of Brazil's territory, have long been a source of conflict, with big business looking to tap their natural riches.

Bolsonaro has railed against what he sees as excessive federal protections for these minorities. On the campaign trail, he said: "If I become president, there won't be one square centimeter of land designated for indigenous reservations." Ivaneide Bandeira, head of the ethno-environmental defense NGO Kaninde, said: "His campaign speeches... became a license to invade indigenous lands."

One of Bolsonaro's first acts as president was to strip FUNAI, a federal agency charged with protecting Indigenous land rights, of its role in setting reservation boundaries, moving that authority to the Agriculture Ministry, often at odds with FUNAI's mandate.

The official now in charge of land issues is Nabhan Garcia, a right-wing farming organizer who has fought against Indigenous reservations for decades.

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