

Indigenous leaders seek European support for Brazil's Amazon



Brussels, November 6 (RHC)-- A delegation of indigenous leaders have announced that they are seeking to recruit European political support against incursions by loggers and cattle ranchers in the Brazilian Amazon and the destruction of rainforest.

Sonia Guajajara, a former Brazilian vice presidential candidate and a prominent voice in efforts to protect the Amazon, told The Associated Press her group will visit a dozen European countries in a 35-day tour. Many European countries have invested in rainforest protection programs.

She said the delegation is meeting with political and religious leaders, companies and activists. The group wants the European Union to scrap a planned trade deal with several South American countries that the indigenous leaders say would bring further clearing of Amazon land.

Fires used to clear land in the Amazon increased sharply in July and August, causing international alarm over a region seen as critical to curbing climate change.

Many have pointed to the policies of Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, who has weakened environmental protections and said he wants to open up parts of the Amazon for commercial farming and mining.

Responding to the international outcry, Bolsonaro deployed the armed forces to the Amazon and implemented a 60-day ban on clearing the forest with fires, which conservation groups said had an effect, with the number of blazes dropping in September and October.

The drop also coincided with the start of the Amazon rainy season, which typically starts in mid-September. Despite this, the blazes have continued in some parts of the forest, with at least 1,000 fires recorded so far this month, according to Brazilian government data.

Separately on Tuesday, a group of indigenous people protested outside the European Council in Brussels, Belgium, against the fires in the Amazon. Protesters also held banners, including one with a photo of Paulo Paulino Guajajara, an indigenous forest defender killed by illegal loggers in an ambush last week in Brazil's Maranhao state.

Celia Xakriaba, a Brazilian forest activist and land defender from the ecoregion of Cerrado, said protesters were highlighting the damage done to their livelihoods and to a vast swath of Brazil's ecosystems and calling for action.

"[The fires] have a direct influence because a fire that burns the Amazon, in reality, does a lot more damage to the Cerrado (tropical savanna region of Brazil), 55 percent of the Brazilian territory and burns a lot more than the Amazon territory," she told The Associated Press news agency.

The activist added that "we would have wanted to come here for other reasons but sadly what brings us here is because capitalism is killing us."

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