

Brazil expels illegal settlers from Indigenous lands in Amazon

Thousands affected as government vows to stamp out land grabs in protected areas

Associated Press in São Paulo

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- Brazilian Indigenous people celebrate after the supreme court upheld the protection of their ancestral lands. Brazil has begun expelling non-Indigenous people from Apyterewa and Trincheira Bacaja lands in Para state. Photograph: Evaristo Sa/AFP/Getty Images
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Brazil's government has begun removing thousands of non-Indigenous people from two native territories in a move that will affect thousands who live in the heart of the **Amazon rainforest**.

The Brazilian intelligence agency ABIN said in a statement that the goal was to return the Apyterewa and Trincheira Bacaja lands in Para state to the original peoples. It did not say whether or not the expulsion of non-Indigenous people had been entirely peaceful.

The territories are located around the municipalities of Sao Felix do Xingu, Altamira, Anapu and Senador Jose Porfirio in Para state. Brazil's government said the **supreme court** and other judges had ordered the operation.



'We defended our right to the land': Brazil's Indigenous people hail supreme court victory

Indigenous groups estimate more than 10,000 non-Indigenous people are living inside the two territories. ABIN said as many as 2,500 Indigenous people live in 51 villages within.

“The presence of strangers on Indigenous land threatens the integrity of the Indigenous [people] and causes other damages, such as the destruction of forests,” the agency said in its statement. It added that about 1,600 families lived illegally in that region with some involved in illegal activities such as cattle raising and gold mining. “They also destroy native vegetation.”

The Apyterewa territory had the most deforestation of any Indigenous land in Brazil for four years running, according to official data. Footage obtained by local media and shared on social media in September showed hundreds of non-Indigenous people living in a newly built town with restaurants, bars and churches deep inside the lands of the Parakana.

Other authorities that participated in the action on Monday included Brazil's ministry of **Indigenous peoples**, environment protection agency IBAMA, the

federal police and armed forces, among many others. Several of those bodies had their powers limited and did little to protect Indigenous people's territories during the far-right administration of former president Jair Bolsonaro between 2019 and 2022.

Brazil's President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva has begun rebuilding environment protection agencies and created eight protected areas for Indigenous people. Soon after the beginning of his administration, his government **expelled thousands of goldminers** from the massive Yanomami Indigenous territory in the northern state of Roraima.



Brazil's first-ever minister for Indigenous peoples: 'It is time for the world to look at our way of life'

State and federal authorities this year also dislodged landgrabbers from the Alto Rio Guama territory. They threatened forcible expulsion of those settlers failing to leave, and pledged to eliminate access roads and irregular installations. Nearly all of the illegal residents departed voluntarily.

Encroachment on such territories over recent years prompted Brazil's top court on Thursday to enshrine Indigenous land rights by denying a suit backed by farmers that sought to block an Indigenous group from expanding the size of its territorial claim.

In the case before the court, Santa Catarina state argued that the date Brazil's constitution was promulgated – 5 October 1988 – should be the deadline for Indigenous peoples to have either physically occupied land or be legally fighting to reoccupy territory. Nine of 11 justices of Brazil's supreme court ruled against that argument, a decision that has national implications.

Outrage as Brazil law threatening Indigenous lands advances in congress

This article is more than 4 months old

Critics denounced 'lies, hatred and racism' as legislation moves to senate after being overwhelmingly endorsed by lower house

Tom Phillips *in Rio de Janeiro*

Wed 31 May 2023 14.46 BST



- An Indigenous woman takes part in a demonstration against the legislation on Indigenous territories, in Brasília this week. Photograph: Sérgio Lima/AFP/Getty Images
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Indigenous leaders and environmentalists in **Brazil** have voiced horror and indignation after lawmakers approved controversial legislation which opponents fear will strike a devastating blow to Indigenous communities and isolated tribes.

Members of Brazil's conservative-dominated lower house overwhelmingly endorsed bill number 490 on Tuesday night, by 283 votes to 155.



Outcry as Brazil congress moves to gut environment and Indigenous ministries

“You will have Indigenous blood on your hands,” the Indigenous congresswoman Célia Xakriabá told its rightwing backers as leftwingers took to the podium to protest by smothering their hands in the red dye of annatto seeds.

Critics say the legislation, which now moves to the senate, poses a series of profound threats to Indigenous communities and the environment:

It potentially opens the door to road-building, mining, dam construction, agricultural projects and the use of genetically modified crops on protected Indigenous lands, as well as authorizing contact with isolated Indigenous groups in certain circumstances.

It would allow the government to reclaim land from Indigenous communities whose “cultural traits” are deemed to have changed.

Perhaps most damagingly, the legislation would also invalidate Indigenous claims to lands such groups could not prove they physically occupied on the day Brazil’s constitution was enacted in October 1988. Activists say that “time limit

trick” could scupper scores of legitimate claims for the delimitation of Indigenous lands, from groups who had already been evicted from their ancestral lands or whose presence had yet to be recognized at the cut-off date.

The Climate Observatory watchdog said Brazil’s parliament had witnessed “its most shameful day since the 2016 **impeachment of Dilma Rousseff**” – a “show of lies, hatred and racism” which signaled the environmental chaos caused by former president Jair Bolsonaro was far from over.

Lawmakers had sent “a clear message to the country and the world: Bolsonaro is gone but the extermination [of Indigenous communities and the environment] continues,” the Climate Observatory added.

Sarah Shenker, a campaigner at human rights group Survival International, said: “This catastrophic bill is the most serious attack on Indigenous rights in decades ... Hundreds of Indigenous territories home to over a million Indigenous people could be destroyed.”

She added: “There are many examples of uncontacted tribes whose existence and location was not yet officially confirmed by government in October 1988 ... so if [this] was approved it could be used by anti-Indigenous politicians who are desperate to steal [such territories].”

When Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva returned to Brazil’s presidency in January there was **optimism South America’s largest country was entering a new era** of sustainable development, environmental protection and respect for Indigenous rights. Lula named the veteran environmentalist Marina Silva as his environment minister and created a ministry for Indigenous peoples run by the Indigenous activist Sônia Guajajara. “We are going to reverse all of the injustices committed against Indigenous peoples,” Lula vowed in his inaugural address, claiming Brazil had a “historic debt” to such groups.

But the rowdy congressional debate that preceded the approval of Bill 490 brought such hopes crashing back down to earth and revealed a starkly divided country.

A succession of white, mostly male lawmakers took the microphone to claim they were supporting the legislation because they considered themselves Indigenous defenders who wanted to help such groups integrate into mainstream society. Many were staunch supporters of Bolsonaro and members

of the powerful *ruralista* bloc linked to agribusiness which boasts 302 of the 513 seats in the lower house and 42 of 81 senators.

Bibo Nunes, a congressman from Bolsonaro's rightwing Liberal party (PL), voiced outrage that nearly 14% of Brazil's territory was in the hands of Indigenous people who represented only 0.4% of the population. "What's the logic? Explain it to me, you lefties!" Nunes bellowed.

Leftist politicians countered that the legislation would endanger Indigenous lives as well as the global struggle against climate change given the crucial role Indigenous communities have in protecting the **Amazon rainforest**.

"This is a bill of death, backwardness and regression ... This is a crime against Indigenous people," said Juliana Cardoso, a congresswoman from Lula's Worker's party (PT).

But such arguments were ignored and the bill passed easily.

Guajajara told activists to remain mobilized in the face of what she called "a serious attack on Indigenous people and the environment". "We will remain steadfast and united, as we always have been," Lula's Indigenous minister said in a video message.