

Boa Vista, 6 May 2022

Hutukara Yanomami Association

Press Release on the Situation concerning the

Disappearance of the Sanomã community of Aracaçá

Hutukara Yanomami Association is publishing this statement to provide information and context about the community of Aracaça, in relation to the news and repercussions circulating among the public.

In the last few days Hutukara has tried to reconstruct the events which the Yanomami have denounced and, although we have not gathered sufficient information to clarify whether the crime denounced occurred or not, we have collected information which shows a grave history of tragedies linked to mining in the community.

Throughout this week we interviewed our relatives who live near the region of Aracaça and an old woman from the community who is receiving medical treatment in the city of Boa Vista. The information we have obtained to date confirms the heart-breaking scenario in which this community lives, in a relationship imposed on them by the miners; this includes testimonies about serial sexual violence.

The oral testimonies recorded were cross referenced with official data from the health district (population censuses for 2017 and 2022 as well as registered deaths), so that it was possible confirm the chronology of the episodes as told to us. The names of the subjects have been omitted to ensure the safety of the informants.

Up to now, it can be ascertained that the history of the tragedies in the community began in 2017, with the death of man known as C. Sanumá. In the register of deaths in the Health Base of Waikás (the base which provides health care to Aracaçá) there is a record of death by gunshot fire in 2017, with the victim aged between 40 – 59 years – this is very likely the death record of C. Sanumá.

C. was violently killed in a fight, provoked during the distribution of sugarcane rum by miners to the Indigenous people. This event occurred near rapids in the river, upstream from Aracaçá community.

C. had two wives. Following his death, his wives were in an extremely vulnerable situation, and were prostituted in the mining camps. The second wife, called W. by the Yanomami, died straight away. There are different versions of her death, but it was possible to confirm in the death register that a person from the same age range as W. died, in 2018, with the cause of death recorded as self-poisoning.

After W.'s death, one of C.'s daughters by his first wife, known locally as K., who was sixteen at the time, was taken to be prostituted in a mining camp near Aracaçá. The interviews indicate that K. was sexually abused by miners, at times being forced to have sexual relations with more than one person at the same time, among other abuses. Moreover, K. lost a baby during this period, who died from an intracranial trauma. The death of a child in this age range is also recorded in the official list of deaths in 2019.

According to the testimonies, K. suffered consequences as a result of the violent sexual relations with the miners, and she also suffered from a permanent physical disability and had difficulty moving about after an accident. K. became pregnant by a miner known as "Pastor" and their child was taken to the city. In despair, she took her own life by hanging herself. This version also tallies with the register of deaths for 2021.

One of K.'s daughters and W.'s other daughter remained in the care of C.'s elderly mother, who is in Boa Vista for medical treatment.

The sequence of tragedies which affected C.'s family show that there is a generalized pattern of cases of abuse and violence in the village of Aracaçá. The vulnerability of people in the community is such that it is quite likely that similar episodes are repeated daily. The facts as narrated in the testimonies corroborate the perception of the Yanomami in the region of Palimiú, who in 2021, described the fear they felt during a tragedy similar to that of Aracaçá, which led to the disappearance of that community.

The denunciations regarding Aracaçá can only be understood in this context, in which half of the villages in the Yanomami Indigenous Territory are subject to harassment by invaders.

Based on this, we demand a fuller and more in-depth investigation into the history of violence as suffered by the Indigenous people of Aracaçá as a consequence of the illegal mining invasion in the Yanomami Indigenous Territory. Due to the fact the Yanomami are an Indigenous people who live according to their traditional customs and speak their ancestral language, such an investigation needs the continued participation of specialists with technical training in anthropology and who have mastered the language for a sufficiently long time to analyse the facts with the depth they deserve. It is also important to remember that in accordance with Yanomami tradition and culture, the body and possessions of their dead are all burned, so it is quite likely that after a murder, it will be impossible to find the mortal remains of the victim and unless this can be done from their cremated ashes. Therefore, it is fundamental to gather statements and to look for witnesses in the community.

The drama that the community of Aracaçá is living through is not an isolated fact in the Yanomami Indigenous Territory. Throughout the entire territory, mining has invaded our lands, destroyed our way of life and our vegetable gardens, and created hunger and conflict. Our women and children are being repeatedly raped in various regions ravaged by mining. Our families are falling ill and dying from diseases which are easily treatable. Our young people are dying from violence due to the firearms brought in by the miners.

We must stop the humanitarian tragedy which is happening to the Yanomami. We want to see our families healthy and safe once more. This will only be possible when the illegal mining in the Yanomami Indigenous Territory is stopped and the miners removed, and the land permanently protected from new invasions. We need commitment from the public authorities and support from society to protect Indigenous Territories, the forest-lands and Indigenous lives. If the government had complied with the legal order by the Regional Federal Tribunal of the 1st Region, which in 2020 determined that illegal miners be removed from our lands, many of the tragedies suffered by the Yanomami would have been avoided.

We have repeatedly insisted that the illegal miners in the Yanomami Indigenous Territory be removed. Our humanitarian tragedy would be avoided if the government complied with the legal order from Regional Federal Tribunal of the 1st Region, which since 2020 ruled that the illegal miners be removed from our lands.