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Massacre of an estimated 40 Yanomami Indians

20 August 1993

**BRAZIL: Yanomami village of Haxumi, including at least 10 children
and seven women**

Amnesty International is gravely concerned at reports of the massacre of an estimated 40 Yanomami Indians from the Haximu village allegedly by gold prospectors in northern Roraima state near Brazil's border with Venezuela, and at persistent impunity for increasing violent attacks on members of this tribe.

News of the massacre of some 17 Yanomami Indians from the village of Haxumi reached a catholic mission in the Xidea region on 17 August 1993 after terrified members of a neighbouring Yanomami village arrived to take refuge, having fled in fear of further attacks by gold prospectors. They reported that gold miners had attacked the Haximu village - killing 10 children, five women and at least two men, slashing arms, legs and heads with machetes - and had set the village on fire.

Members of the government's indian agency FUNAI, Fundação Nacional do Indio, investigating the massacre have subsequently interviewed survivors and on 19 August reached the site of the massacre, where they encountered mutilated bodies. According to a FUNAI spokesperson, "The number of Indians killed was much higher than believed, about 40 were murdered. The men were gunned down while the women and children were killed with machetes. Some of the children were decapitated".

Brazil's Minister of Justice, Mauricio Corrêa, and Attorney Federal General, Aristedes Junqueira, flew to Roraima on 19 August accompanied by police and FUNAI officials. The Attorney General stated on television, "I have no doubts about calling this genocide".

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Yanomami Indians who live in the forest on the border with Venezuela are officially estimated to number over 9000. They are the largest of Brazil's tribal groups who through their isolation managed to maintain their traditional way of life. 10,000 members of this tribal group live across the border in the southern part of Venezuela. Their lands are rich in mineral resources. Following the illegal entry of thousands of gold prospectors into Yanomami lands in 1987 some 1,500 Yanomami are estimated to have died from violence and disease. Since 1990 there have been several government attempts to remove illegal gold prospectors from the area and in November 1991 the government signed a decree officially demarcating 9.4 million hectares of land as the Yanomami Indian reserve. However there are constant reports of re-entry of Brazilian miners into Yanomami lands both in Brazil and in Venezuela. News of the killing at the end of July of another 5 Yanomami by miners in the same region, but across the border in Venezuela, was also reported this week.

To Amnesty International's knowledge, of 16 cases of killings of Yanomami between 1984-92 in which police investigations were actually opened, not one has come to trial.

In 1963 an estimated 30 Ureu-wau-wau Indians including women and children were massacred in the São Tomé rubber plantation in the western state of Rondônia. A case

brought against the plantation owner for the killings has languished in the courts for 30 years and still has not come to trial.

In January 1993 Amnesty International published the report, 'We are the Land': Indigenous Peoples' Struggle for Human Rights AMR 19/32/92) alerting to the dangers of escalating violence against members of Brazil's 180 indigenous groups. It documented over 50 cases of violent attacks on members of indigenous groups in Brazil, including the Yanomami, and called upon the Brazilian government to put a stop to persistent impunity for such crimes, which stimulated further violence

against these groups. Amnesty International drew attention to the special vulnerability of isolated indigenous groups and suggested that the prompt resolution of demarcation disputes and conflicts between the indigenous and non-indigenous population was one of the most important ways of preventing future abuses. Although under the 1988 Constitution all indigenous lands are to be demarcated by October 1993, since January the demarcation program has been stalled.

1993 is the United Nations Year for the World's Indigenous Peoples.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters either in Portuguese, English or in your own language:

- expressing concern at reports of the massacre of an estimated 40 Yanomami Indians from the Village of Haxumi in Roraima;
- calling for a full investigation of the circumstances of the killings, that those found responsible are brought to justice and that impunity for such cases is brought to a halt;
- urging that all steps are taken to protect the physical integrity of Yanomami Indians;
- urging that the government put an end to impunity for violent attacks against members of Brazil's indigenous communities, which if left untackled can only lead to further violence.

APPEALS TO

1) Head of Federal Police, Roraima:

Sr. Superintendente de Policia Federal
Sr Suami Santos
Departamento da Policia Federal
Rua Agnelo Bittercourt
69.000 Boa Vista
Roraima, Brazil

Telegrams: Superintendente de Policia Federal Santos, Roraima, Brazil

Salutation : Vossa Excelencia/Your Excellency

2) Minister of Justice:

Exmo Sr Ministro da Justiça
Sr Mauricio Corrêa
Esplanada dos Ministérios, Bloco 23
70.064 Brasília, D.F. Brazil

Telegrams: Ministro Justiça, Brasília, Brazil

Telexes: 611003 MNJU BR, 611088 MNUJ BR or 612313 MNJU BR

Faxes: +55 61 321 4145, + 55 61 224 2448

Salutation : Vossa Excelência/ Your Excellency

3) Attorney General

Exmo Sr Procurador Geral da República
Dr Aristedes Alvarenga Junqueira
Avenida L2 Sul, SG AS 603, Lote 23 s.328

Brasilia D.F., Brazil

Telegrams: Sr Procurador Geral da República, Brasilia, Brazil

Salutation : Vossa Excelência/Your Excellency

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

Local non-governmental organization:

Comissão pela Criação do Parque Yanomami

R Capitão Bessa 272

S. Pedro

69.300 Boa Vista, Roraima, Brazil

National Indian Foundation offices in Reraima:

Administracão Regional de FUNAI

Rua Bento Brasil 536-E

69.301-050 Boa Vista

Roraima

and to diplomatic representatives of Brazil accredited to your country

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 1 October 1993.