

South America Report

March 2021



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Aim

This report is intended to raise awareness about the difficulties minorities and marginalised groups face during these times in Colombia and Brazil. It covers a few significant human rights events concerning minority and marginalised groups in March of 2021.

Brazil



Country:	Brazil
Population:	212 million (212.923.484)
Capital:	Brasília
Largest city	São Paulo
Major languages:	Portuguese is the official language of Brazil. However, there are more than 305 indigenous ethnicities that speak 274 different languages.
Religion:	64% of the population in Brazil (about 123 million) declare themselves to be Catholic; 22.2% (about 42.3 million) declare themselves protestants (traditional evangelicals, Pentecostals, and neo-Pentecostals); 8% (about 15.3 million) declare themselves without a religion: atheists, agnostics, or deists; and others represent 3.2%.
Ethnicities:	Approximately 47,73% of people in Brazil are white, 43,13% are 'pardo' (combined European, Native and African ancestry), 7.61% is black, 1,09% are of Asian origin, and 0,43% are indigenous
Life expectancy at birth	79,8 years for females and 72,8 for males.

Chart 1: Main characteristic of Brazil. Figures from the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia y Estatística. (IBGE, 2021)

Brazil is the largest country in South America and the fifth most populated in the world. It is estimated that 212 million people inhabit Brazil (IBGE, 2021). Its population is remarkably diverse in terms of race and ethnic groups. The country faces many social problems, such as violence, poverty, and social inequality (Maia, n.d).

During more than 300 years of slavery in the Americas, Brazil was the largest importer of African slaves and was the last country in the western hemisphere to abolish slavery in 1888 (Telles, n.d). Today, institutional racism remains ingrained in Brazilian society; the conditions generated in the slavery context persist to this day and are manifested in structural discrimination that Afro-Brazilians suffers. According to Silvio Almeida, structural racism "constituting itself as a process by which the circumstances of privileges are spread among racial groups and are manifested in economic, political spaces and institutional" (Souza & Inovacao, 2019, p.214).

In the 2010 census, 817,963 indigenous people belonging to 305 different ethnicities were registered (IBGE, 2021). The presence of indigenous people in Brazil is not homogeneous throughout the region; about half of Brazil's indigenous people live outside the Amazon in the savannas and the forests (Survival, n.d). The most numerous indigenous people are the Guaraní, who have lost practically all of their territory due to livestock and crops (Survival, n.d). The Tikunas, being the Akuntsus, the smallest one, with just four members (Survival, n.d). Still, the ones with the largest territory are the Yanomami (Survival, n.d)

Human Rights violation against minorities in Brazil

Brazil's harmful colonial legacy continues today for those most vulnerable to human rights violations: indigenous peoples, the black and mixed-race populations, and the LGBT+ community. To this day, minorities remain distant from all spheres of power (The Brazilian Report, 2018) and become more exposed to suffer different kinds of discrimination (Soares Leivas & Moreira Aristides dos Santos, 2018). According to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.¹

Many of these people, due to discrimination based on ethnic-racial origin, end up in a cycle of poverty that compels them to extremely precarious housing situations and, consequently, exposes them violence perpetrated by criminal groups and organisations, such as militias and drug trafficking; as well as those who work in human trafficking (internal and international) or the exploitation of working conditions similar to slavery (IACHR, 2021, p.11).²

Brazil's indigenous populations are often marginalised and suffer from discrimination, putting them at risk of violence and abuse. Since Jair Bolsonaro became the president in January 2019, his administration team has weakened environmental law enforcement significantly impacted indigenous communities. For instance, deforestation in the Amazon rose by 85%. Invasions of Indigenous territories to access their resources increased by 135%, according to the non-profit Indigenist Missionary Council (Human Rights Watch, Brazil, events 2021, 2020). Thus, the indigenous populations in the Amazon are even more vulnerable in the current Brazilian government. The current government has not considered the environment as the primary goal in its policies (The New York Times, 2019).

¹ The main function of the IACHR is the promotion of the human rights protection in the Americas. Due to the mandates the Commission receives and investigates individual petitions, conducts *in loco* visits to analyse the human rights situation of Member States of the OAS that ratified the American Convention, recommend measures to states, request the adoption of precautionary measures among others.

² <https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/reports/pdfs/Brasil2021-en.pdf>

Gender-based violence

Violence against women in Brazil continues to increase with alarming murders because of their gender (Agência Brasil, 2018). In this regard, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean³ highlighted that 40% of women's murders are committed in Brazil (ECLAC, 2018). Likewise, for the Security Secretariat⁴ in 2017, 1.133 of 4.539 murders were classified as femicide (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, 2018).

Brazil has undertaken several international obligations and has enacted several domestic laws to ensure women lives' protection. At the international level, Brazil ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW),⁵ the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women "Convention *Belem do Para*",⁶ and the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children. The UN Resolution 1325, adopted by the Security Council on October 31st, 2000, which established a historical, legal and political framework recognising the relevance of women's participation as the inclusion of gender perspective, is also considered a normative framework.

At the domestic level, Brazil has enacted legislation addressed to protect women's lives. Law No. 11.340 of 2006 (Maria da Penha of Brazil)⁷ regulates violence against women in every aspect of their life; Law No. 13.104 of 2015 (Femicide Law)⁸ provides a legal definition of femicides; Law No. 13.871 of 2019 establishes obligations of reparation to aggressors that committed domestic violence.

Despite Brazil's obligation to protect, respect, and ensure women's rights, the pandemic had worsened the exercise of their rights. According to the Brazilian Forum for Public Safety, the country recorded 649 femicides during the first semester of 2020 (Olivares, 2021), which shows how women continue to be cruelly murdered. Public policies are not enough to address femicides.

³ One of the regional commissions of the UN, it was established by Economic and Social Council Resolution 106 of 1948. It contributes to the promotion of economic and social development in Latin America, undertakes research and support activities, provides advice to the governments among others.

⁴ The Security Secretariat is responsible of the implementation of the public security policy in the Federal District.

⁵ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cedaw.aspx>

⁶ <https://www.oas.org/en/MESECVI/convention.asp>

⁷ <https://oig.cepal.org/en/fair-policies/law-11340-maria-da-penha-brazil>

⁸ [https://www.law.cornell.edu/women-and-justice/resource/law_no._13.104/2015_\(%E2%80%9Clei_do_femicidio%20%9D\)](https://www.law.cornell.edu/women-and-justice/resource/law_no._13.104/2015_(%E2%80%9Clei_do_femicidio%20%9D))

Crimes against indigenous people

Indigenous people suffer from structural discrimination and, therefore, are exposed to intersectional structural violence (Procuradoira – General da Republica, 2020), such as intimidation, threats, violent physical actions, and attacks against their communities often occur (Conselho Indigenista Missionario, 2018). The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, in the last report, showed concerns about the current acts of violence against indigenous leaders and communities, including several murders and homicides (IACHR, 2021).

Brazil has ratified several international instruments addressed to protect and guarantee indigenous human rights. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,⁹ the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,¹⁰ the Inter-American Convention on Human Rights¹¹ and the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (No.169)¹² include relevant provisions which seek to ensure that indigenous people enjoy their rights.

The Brazilian Domestic Law system has acknowledged indigenous 'people's rights in a specific chapter in the 1988 Brazilian Constitution,¹³ ensuring respect for social organisation, customs, languages, beliefs, and traditions (Oliveira, 2017). Besides Law 6.001 of 1973,¹⁴ well-known as the Statute of the Indian, has the primary purpose of protecting indigenous people customs and integrating them to the protection of domestic law.

⁹ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>

¹⁰ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>

¹¹ https://www.oas.org/dil/treaties_b-32_american_convention_on_human_rights.pdf

¹² https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C169

¹³ <https://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/br/br117en.pdf>

¹⁴ http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/leis/l6001.htm

Human Rights events of March 2021

In less than a month, a second indigenous of Temb  ethnic group is murdered in northeastern Par , Brazil



Picture 3 On February 12th, the Temb  people also lost Isac Temb  murdered in the same municipality. Picture by: Archive/Temb  People

On March 2nd, Benedito Cordeiro de Carvalho, an indigenous man of the Temb  ethnic group, was murdered during the day. A person on a motorcycle chased him, and while trying to escape, he was shot. The Civil Police said that it continues to investigate the murder of Benedito de Carvalho, using images from the collection by cameras close to the local of the crime. (Barbosa, 2021)

The victim had his indigenous identity questioned, considering that he no longer lived in the indigenous village and only returned to visit relatives. However, these questions are racist and aim to delegitimise the assassination of Benedito as persecution for his identity. Indigenous leaders are often under threat of farmers, political forces, and other criminal alliances interested in taking over indigenous lands. So, indigenous leaders are persecuted and murdered exclusively because of their race and political role in the community. (Barbosa, 2021)

M rcio Couto Henrique, professor at the Faculty of History and the Graduate Program in Social History of the Amazon of the Federal University of Par  (UFPA), states that there is a stereotyped and racist view that when indigenous peoples detached themselves from nature, they are no longer seen as indigenous. According to the professor, this view comes from colonial times; when indigenous people

leave their community and go to the city, they are seen as a civilised peasant, caboclo, but never indigenous. (Barbosa, 2021)

In 2020, 47 women were victims of femicide in the State of Ceará, Brazil.



Picture 4 The Maria da Penha Law determines the creation of services to care for women victims of violence. Photo: Ricardo Giusti.

A report developed by the 'Rede de Observatórios da Segurança' (Network of Security Observatories) attested that in the State of Ceará, there were 47 femicides in 2020, approximately four crimes per month. (Cidadania) Throughout Brazil, from March to April 2020, the number of femicides increased by 22% compared to 2019, according to data from the Brazilian Public Security Forum (FBSF).

The increase in this crime reflects the lack of access and support for domestic violence victims during the pandemic. The Patrulha Maria da Penha ("Maria da Penha 'Patrol') is a system that aims to protect women against domestic violence in Brazil. In this system, women can call 153 and receive assistance from the 'victim's centre. (Santana, Brasil de fato, 2021) However, after accessing systems and reporting the violence they have suffered, many women remain in a victim position, continuously suffering from femicide. This was the case with Cícera Samires dos Santos Souza, murdered in November 2020 in the State of Ceará. The perpetrator identified as her former partner, Hélio Adelino da Silva, 33 years old. The victim already had a protective order issued against him before consummating the crime. (Santana, Brasil de fato, 2021)

Another effective long-term measure would be changing men's mindsets. Marketing campaigns and implementation of these discussions could be an effective way to present healthy and non-violent ways that man can use to address personal issues. (UNESCO, s.d.) Therefore, men and boys are allies in eliminating gender-based violence, considering that in a society ruled by gender norms, men often control family lives and violent behaviours are on the rise in economic crises. (UNESCO, s.d.)

“Pandemic has made what has always existed more dramatic”, says philosopher Silvia Federici



Picture 5 Photo: Victoria Furtado

A survey provided by IPEA (Institute for Applied Economic Research) showed that more than 8.5 million women lost their jobs because of the covid-19 pandemic, and thereby, further reducing female representation in the labour market.

The Philosopher Silvia Federici explains, “The pandemic has made more visible, more dramatic, more urgent what has always existed. But of course, now this is much more visible. It is quite visible that those who are dying are poorest people, the ones who suffer the most discrimination. She believes that this is a decisive moment for feminist movements to build a strong mobilisation engaging with different social levels to confront structural policies that still discriminate against women (Las comadres purpuras, 2021).

Brazilian women are leaders of many households, so many strive even more to provide financially for their family members. Vanessa Macedo da Silva, a resident of the Favela of Paraisópolis in São Paulo, had to find a way to supplement family income in these times of crisis.

Ms. da Silva, who is also the mother of a 13-year-old girl and an 11-month-old girl, said she was already unemployed when Covid-19 arrived in Brazil. And the pandemic forced her to become a small entrepreneur. (Veiga, s.d.)

States can support women by introducing economic support packages, expanding unemployment benefits, tax breaks, and extended family and child benefits for vulnerable women and their families. (Women, 2020). In addition, businesses owned by women can be supported by means of fundings, subsidies and state-backed loans. (Women, 2020)

Colombia



Country:	Colombia
Population:	48 million (48.258,494)
Capital:	Bogotá
Largest city	Bogotá
Major languages:	The overwhelming majority of Colombians speak Spanish (99,2%), but 101 languages are listed for Colombia in the Ethnologue database.
Religion:	79% of people declare themselves as Catholic Christians. 6% adopt Pentecostalism, 2%

	mainline protestant while 6% other protestants. 2% other religions and 5% is unspecified.
Ethnicities:	4.4% of the Colombian population belongs to the 115 indigenous peoples; 7.3% of the Colombian population belongs to the Afro-Colombian population; 0.01% of the Colombian population belongs to the Romani people.
Life expectancy at birth	77,10 years for females and 70,95 years for males.

Chart 2: Main characteristic of Colombia. Figures from the Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística (DANE, Cuantos somos?, 2021)

Colombia is the fifth largest country in Latin America, with the second-largest population of Spanish speakers. It is called the "Gateway to South America" as it is located in the continent's northwestern part. It is estimated that 48 million people inhabit Colombia (DANE, Cuantos somos?, 2021). Its population is diverse in terms of race and ethnic groups. The component of civil struggles and wars was the seed from which ethno-racial discrimination germinates. It affected the discriminatory treatment that minorities in Colombia, mainly indigenous and Afro-Colombians, have suffered for a long time (Programa de Justicia Global y Derechos Humanos, 2009).

Starting in the 1970s, indigenous people fostered a process of cultural reaffirmation and awareness of their identity that culminated in recognition of the country as multi-ethnic and multilingual in the new Constitutional Charter of 1991¹⁵ (DANE, 2007, p. 16). Multiple laws have been enacted to protect indigenous rights; however, Colombia is currently suffering a humanitarian emergency in the framework of the Covid-19 Pandemic due to the violations of the human rights of indigenous peoples

¹⁵ http://www.secretariassenado.gov.co/senado/basedoc/constitucion_politica_1991.html

continue. According to the statistics provided by Indigenous Peoples, the community has been affected by confinement, forced displacement, homicides, and death by omitting the state, collective and individual threat, among others (Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos de los Pueblos Indígenas, 2020).

Human Rights violation against minorities in Colombia

The context of widespread violence and neglect of minorities has affected the enjoyment of fundamental rights. It has intensified impoverishment, the state of defencelessness, and the loss of hope. Unfortunately, the highest poverty levels, social exclusion, and marginalisation occur within areas where most minorities are concentrated.

Forced displacement of indigenous people because of the armed conflict

Forced displacement has injured the lives of millions of indigenous people. It is a sinister act with broken life projects and groups, family relationships, belonging to a territory, and, therefore, it has cracked Colombian society. Structural exclusion, mining and agriculture in regions where there are strong tensions between armed groups. Inadequate legal and institutional protection are the main factors in violating the indigenous population's human rights (ACNUR, n.d). According to the Victims Unit, a state institution in charge of coordinating the assistance, care and reparation measures granted by the state, in Colombia, as of March 2021, there were 9,113,500 victims of armed conflict, of which 8,107,579 are victims of forced displacement (Unidad para la atención y reparación integral de víctimas, 2021).

The communities live in fear and concern because there is no respect for the indigenous territories. Illegal armed groups threaten and kill indigenous people, forcing survivors to leave their territories and move to the city. Due to the massive displacements of indigenous people, there is a risk of physical and cultural extermination.

The obligations and standards related to the protection of minorities are found mainly in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination,¹⁶ the American Convention on Human Rights, the Inter-American Convention against Racism, Racial Discrimination and related forms of Intolerance,¹⁷ the Inter-American Convention to Prevent, Punish and Eradicate Violence against Women, (Convention of Belem Do Para), Deng Principles of the United Nations,¹⁸ the Durban Declaration,¹⁹ ILO Convention 169.

Since 1995, Colombia began to acknowledge the problem of displacement and the need to address it. Through the document CONPES 2804, specific institutional responsibilities are assigned to deal with forced displacement; for example, in returns and resettlements, measures must be taken to reincorporate

¹⁶ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cerd.aspx>

¹⁷ http://www.oas.org/en/sla/dil/inter_american_treaties_a-68_racism.asp

¹⁸ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/idpersons/pages/standards.aspx>

¹⁹ <https://www.un.org/en/durbanreview2009/ddpa.shtml>

the displaced population into Colombian society (Departamento Nacional de Planeación, 1995). Thanks to Law 387 of 1997,²⁰ measures were adopted to prevent forced displacement, including care, protection, socio-economic stabilisation of the internally displaced.

Attacks against indigenous people

In Colombia, the Truth Commission mentioned that indigenous people suffer a humanitarian crisis as the violence does not stop. The conflict does not allow them to carry out their survival activities; public order worsens. With the increase in displacement and threats to indigenous people, there has been a lot of recruitment of young people by the groups that are present in the region (Comision de la Verdad, 2020). In the past few years, attacks and murders against indigenous people have been a concern within the Inter-American System, thus in 2019, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights recommend to Colombia to “immediately adopt all the necessary measures to guarantee the right to life, integrity, and security of the inhabitants through the institutions in charge of citizen security, and in particular of those who make up the indigenous people”. (IACHR, 2019).

Colombia has ratified several international instruments addressed to protect and guarantee indigenous human rights. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Inter-American Convention on Human Rights and the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (No.169) include relevant provisions which seek to ensure that indigenous people enjoy their rights.

In the context of the constitutional recognition of the ethnic and cultural diversity of the Colombian nation, the Colombian Constitution of 1991 protects ethnic diversity.²¹ It promotes adopting special measures to counter the historical effects of discrimination.²² Even though the 1991 Political Constitution defined ethnic and cultural wealth as an ideal (Blanco, 2005), recognising and vindicating ‘minorities’ rights have not had due protection that guarantees their integrity, human rights, and fundamental freedoms.

²⁰ <https://secretariageneral.gov.co/transparencia/control/informaci%C3%B3n-poblaci%C3%B3n-vulnerable/ley-387-1997#:~:text=Por%20la%20cual%20se%20adoptan.en%20la%20Rep%C3%ABlica%20de%20Colombia.>

²¹ Art. 7

²² Art. 13

The negative impact of climate change on indigenous territories

For the most part, the indigenous peoples live in rural areas where they maintain a subsistence economy that allows them to obtain food and supplies to construct houses, transport, medicines, and other resources. The climate phenomena have affected the territories causing scarcity of food and drinking water. The government has shown a low capacity to provide a public good and meet the population's basic needs. For the International Labour Organization, the characteristics of climate change that threats multiply combined with certain climate-related actions have become major obstacles to overcome in efforts to ensure the livelihoods, cultures and well-being of indigenous peoples". (ILO, 2018, p.13).

The environmental impacts of climate change currently constitute a severe threat to the rights of indigenous peoples. The increase in rains and droughts is generating a severe impact on indigenous family food and supplies (Somos Iberoamerica, 2019). In most of the territories inhabited by indigenous people, there are not enough water bodies to supply a population; their primary water sources in some communities as the Wayuu, are the *jagueyes* which do not have the most favourable storage conditions favourable for human consumption.

Indigenous people are suffering a dramatic situation due to the high temperatures and the absence of rain; the drought is so intense that hundreds of animals have died, and crops are now withered (Alerta Caribe, 2020). Additionally, it is causing severe health problems related to dehydration and malnutrition processes that have resulted in death in the most severe cases.

Human Rights Events of March 2021

Illegal armed groups threaten the territories of indigenous peoples in Antioquia, Colombia



Picture 6 Indigenous Peoples in Antioquia displaced searching for places to stay safely. @Photograph: Cortesia OIA

In Dabeiba, Antioquia, there are about a thousand indigenous people confined out of fear. The curfew announced by the National Liberation Army (ELN) to plant mines in the territory has prevented the peaceful and free mobilisation of seven communities located in the Urabá Antioqueño (Valencia, 2021).

The National Organization of Indigenous People of Colombia (ONIC) declared a humanitarian emergency in Antioquia, urging that the ELN, the AGC and other illegal armed groups have been close to their territories installing explosive devices (Noticiasrcn.com, 2021). The ONIC is requesting the permanent presence of the Army to guarantee their safety. Current situation as it is, is getting in the way of access to their crops and the possibility of hunting and fishing, as these communities have historically done (Valencia, 2021).

They pointed out that members of the ELN have installed these mines in the upper parts of the rivers that flow into the Atrato, particularly in the municipality of Murindó, jetties, roads and crops (Noticiasrcn.com, 2021). There is not only fear but also hunger, anxiety; there is much sadness and psychological damage” said Amelicia Santacruz, representative of the Indigenous Organization of Antioquia (Noticiasrcn.com, 2021). Some of the victims of violence flee to urban areas and large cities. Others do not even dare to flee.

On July 11th 2020, the National Government announced the beginning of the humanitarian demining operations in Dabeiba as one of the priorities. However, in recent months the planting of new mines by illegal groups has prevailed. In this regard, the Mayor acknowledged that the demining process has not begun yet. He already met with the Humanitarian Demining Commission and the National Army to guarantee progress with what was planned in the territory. He also assured that the indigenous communities themselves ask for military demining or humanitarian demining as soon as possible because they are very affected (Valencia, 2021).

Frontino, Murindó and rural areas of the West, Atrato Medio and Bajo Cauca have also been affected by mines in recent months, as denounced by the Indigenous Organization of Antioquia (OIA). On March 3rd, OIA announced the displacement of 48 indigenous families (168 people) due to express threats from the ELN in the Río Murindó and Río Chageradó Resguardos in Murindó, Antioquia (Valencia, 2021).

In addition, they explained that as a resistance mechanism not to abandon their ancestral lands, people are displaced within the same indigenous resguardo (special protected communal land reserves) and are forced to move through allegedly mined fields (Valencia, 2021).

Regarding this situation, the governor of Antioquia, Luis Fernando Suárez Vélez, assured that this is a flagrant violation of International Humanitarian Law and rejected the actions that the ELN and the “clan of the ‘Gulf’ have carried out against the indigenous communities of this zone. He also insisted that this is a structural problem in a region that has been abandoned by the State (Valencia, 2021).

In these circumstances, more than three hundred indigenous people from the Jaidukama reservation were also forced to leave their territories. Despite their return, and according to information from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), they have been confined for more than three weeks as a result of threats and clashes between armed actors in the area (Valencia, 2021).

Humanitarian situations such as those mentioned above have been occurring with various indigenous peoples living in the department. For this reason, the OIA declared a humanitarian emergency on March 12th. In the official communiqué issued by the ONIC, they denounced that coca and illegal mining are increasingly gaining ground. Forced recruitment is recurrent, and massive displacements have already taken place, with others imminent (Valencia, 2021).

In addition, they highlighted that drop by drop displacements and selective assassinations are a constant in the territories and pointed out that micro-trafficking reigns and its control is the cause of disputes between armed groups that create factions, exposing our young indigenous people as never before (Valencia, 2021).

With the declaration of humanitarian emergency, the indigenous communities demand more attention. The ONIC demanded the departmental government to adopt the necessary measures to stop the situation suffered by the Embera Eyábida, Embera Chamí, Embera Dóbida, Gunadule, Senú and Nutabe indigenous peoples (Noticiasrcn.com, 2021).

We demand the establishment of a dialogue table between the indigenous authorities, the human rights commission of the Government of Antioquia, and control agencies, to agree on the procedure for humanitarian demining” said the ONIC (Noticiasrcn.com, 2021).

Intense drought punishes indigenous peoples in Sucre



Picture 7 Indigenous woman travelling with her daughter and a donkey to collect as much water as possible @Photograph: Archivo Particular/Eltiempo.

The people of the indigenous zone of Sucre are suffering these days from the intense summer. The drought is destroying crops and causing the death of cattle (Barrios, 2021).

One of the most affected areas is San Antonio de Palmito, where many indigenous people of the Zenú ethnic group are concentrated. They are seeing how the little water they had collected is gradually running out.

Every year we experience this shortage, especially in the first three months of the year, but today the drought is impressive, the reservoirs have dried up, and we as the animals are suffering” says Iván Roqueme, a resident of the rural area of San Antonio de Palmito (Barrios, 2021).

So far, in 2021, only two heavy downpours have fallen, which has not been enough for these communities to collect enough water in the area’s natural reservoirs. In addition to the indigenous communities of Palmito, there are also the inhabitants of Escobar Abajo and Escobar Arriba, in the jurisdiction of Sampedo, where there is another important number of indigenous people (Barrios, 2021).

This is the area of Sucre where the caña flecha is grown, raw material for the production of vueltaios hats, bags and other elements of the indigenous culture but this year they have not yet been able to cultivate any of this. (Barrios, 2021). Sampedo is one of the artisan zones of Sucre, where its inhabitants live from the production of items based on the caña flecha.

The situation led the representatives of the reservation to ask for help from the National Risk Unit, which through its delegation in Sucre, initiated the construction of dams and *jagüeyes* (water reservoirs). In response to the severe drought that has been occurring in the department, five water reservoirs are being built to harvest water so that the indigenous populations of this region can have the precious liquid at this time of the year” said Carlos Carrascal, delegate of the National Risk Unit (Barrios, 2021). He said that in addition to these works, others are being executed in the rural areas of Toluviejo, Ovejas, Sincelejo and Sampués itself (Barrios, 2021).

In San Antonio de Palmito, five indigenous communities are affected, and with the works that began, it is expected to benefit three thousand families. With these dams, we can now collect water, take it to the houses and water the animals”, said Yaimi Contreras from the Zenú Indigenous Resguardo (Barrios, 2021). In Sincé, San Juan de Betulia and Galeras, in the Sabana region, the situation is the same as in the indigenous reserves.

Coast of Colombia



Picture 8 Staff from the Colombian Ombudsman's Office helps a group of displaced indigenous people from the department of Chocó.
@Photograph: DefensoriaCol

Running from the violence of illegal armed groups in their home department Choco, situated at the Pacific coast of Colombia, hundreds of people from the indigenous community of Embera Katio have fled to Puerto Rico, a municipality in the neighbouring department Risaralda (teleSUR - SH, 2021).

The mayor of the Colombian municipality of Pueblo Rico requested support from the national government to assist more than 300 displaced indigenous people. “The call I make to the national government is to look at the possibility of giving support to the indigenous communities of the national territory, especially in Chocó, since today we have more than 300 people displaced to the urban area of the municipality of Pueblo Rico, which we are attending with great effort and we are seeking support from other entities of the department of Chocó, Bagadó and the Victims Unit so they can give us a hand in this time”, said Leonardo Siagama, Mayor of Pueblo Rico (teleSUR - SH, 2021).

Furthermore, one of the main concerns regarding the displacement in the region is that it leads to overcrowded shelters, which at the same time generates massive infections of Covid-19 in the area, as there is no adequate structure in place to guarantee isolation while attending and housing the displaced people.

Danilo Meja, the ombudsman for the municipality of Pueblo Rico, expressed his concern that the overcrowding in shelters caused by the arrival of indigenous people could result in major Covid-19

outbreaks in the region. According to Mejia, the municipality lacks the facilities and space to ensure isolation (teleSUR - SH, 2021).

For his part, the Secretary of the Government of Risaralda, said that due to the threats of violence against the Embera Katío ethnic group, the departmental authorities have arranged humanitarian aid for the Indigenous peoples in Pueblo Rico (teleSUR - SH, 2021). Already on March 7th, 2021, The Secretary of the Departmental Government, together with the Victims Unit of the Coffee Axis, the 'Ombudsman's Office and the 'Mayor's Office of Pueblo Rico, carried out a humanitarian support day with 33 families from Bagadó Chocó (teleSUR - SH, 2021). By order of Governor Victor Tamayo, food and portable toilets were arranged for them; meanwhile, the situation that caused their displacement was overcome.

The displaced Embera Katío indigenous community has requested the 'Governor's Office of Chocó to set up a negotiation table so that the return of the indigenous people to their communities can take place in the next few days (teleSUR - SH, 2021).

Concluding remarks

The importance of acknowledgement of indigenous identity from authorities investigating crimes is essential. Hence, the international community should work against racial stereotypes to delegitimise the murder of indigenous leader, and play an active role in monitoring the investigation of the crimes.

The crisis caused by the pandemic has undoubtedly affected women more drastically. Thus, they need specific assistance measures so that the gender disparity does not grow further and does not affect children and other family members who generally depend directly on them. Besides, educational measures addressed to change typical masculine behaviors such as aggressiveness in conflicts and protective measures such as care policies are essential.

The violence generated by illegal armed groups in the surroundings of protected indigenous territories in Colombia urgently needs to be addressed. As proposed by a number of Indigenous Organisations, a negotiation table must be set in order for the parties to discuss what can be done to maintain peace in the region and ensure that the indigenous people can safely return to their territories and activities.

The impacts of global climate change become every year more evident. Particularly, in the first trimester of 2021, the intense drought has brought the indigenous population and its livestock in danger. Efforts to improve the infrastructure of water supply and finding alternative natural water resources in remote areas have been made, but they should continue to be supported and funded.

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