

Brazil Congress fast-tracks 'death package' bill to mine on Indigenous lands

by Sarah Brown on 15 March 2022

- *Thousands of protesters, including celebrities, activists and 150 Indigenous people from eight ethnic groups, gathered for the biggest environment protest ever held in Brazil's capital against a series of bills dubbed the "death package" by critics.*
- *Protesters say the slate of five key bills will cause unbridled environmental damage and violate Indigenous rights by encouraging commercial activities in vulnerable regions and invasions of Indigenous territories.*
- *While the protests were taking place, the lower house of Congress voted to fast-track one of those bills, which would allow mining on Indigenous lands — an activity that's banned under Brazil's Constitution.*
- *While some lawmakers say they oppose the bills and will vote against them, the bills enjoy the support of President Jair Bolsonaro and the powerful agribusiness lobby.*

As thousands of people (<https://twitter.com/obsclima/status/1501686559564832771?s=20&t=zYNDF8NaAdtIms6N9GZEpw>) protested in Brazil's capital against a "death package" of bills deemed anti-environmental and anti-Indigenous, the lower house of Congress agreed to fast-track one of those bills, which would allow mining inside Indigenous lands.

The move by the Chamber of Deputies triggered a public outcry, with more than 15,000 people (<https://twitter.com/obsclima/status/1501686559564832771?s=20&t=zYNDF8NaAdtIms6N9GZEpw>) turning out in the biggest environmental protest ever held in Brasília.

Critics say (<https://news.mongabay.com/2022/02/brazil-agrochemical-bill-nears-passage-in-bolsonaros-agenda-of-death/>) these bills encourage irreversible environmental degradation, violate the rights of Indigenous people, and fail to meet other social rights protected in the Constitution.

<https://twitter.com/apiboficial/status/1501918599274975238?s=21>

Among the demonstrators were around 150 Indigenous children, women and men from eight ethnic groups, who had traveled from the northeastern state of Bahia to Brasília. The rest of the protest was made up by a demonstration called "Ato Pela Terra" (Stand for the Earth) (<https://twitter.com/SmokeSignalBR/status/1500867067108593668?s=20&t=BtU-IpsESQ3gMnaBbuCgzg>) led by celebrated Brazilian musician Caetano Veloso. Renowned for his past political persecution as well as his music, Veloso was joined by thousands of fellow celebrities, activists and supporters united against the anti-environmental agenda in Congress's docket of priority legislation this year.

In a speech to Rodrigo Pacheco (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yVbUmxxhFQU>), the president of Brazil's Congress, Veloso said "deforestation in the Amazon is out of control. Violence against Indigenous and other traditional peoples has increased. A series of bills now on the agenda in the National Congress could make the situation even more serious."

Forest loss from deforestation and deliberate fires in the Amazon has been trending upward since 2012 (<https://news.mongabay.com/2022/02/january-deforestation-in-the-amazon-highest-in-14-years/>), with deforestation rates at the start of this year the highest of any January dating back to 2008, according to data from the National Institute for Space

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Council (CIMI), an advocacy group affiliated with the Catholic Church. In 2020 (<https://cimi.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/relatorio-violencia-povos-indigenas-2020-cimi.pdf>), 182 Indigenous people were killed, a 66% increase from 2017 (<https://cimi.org.br/2018/09/relatorio-cimi-violencia-contra-os-povos-indigenas-no-brasil-tem-aumento-sistemico-e-continuo/#:~:text=Em%202017%20foram%20registrados%20110,a%20notifica%C3%A7%C3%A3o%20de%20novos%20assassinatos.>). Cases of land invasion, illegal exploitation of natural resources, and damage to property came to 263 recorded cases in 2020, up from 160 in 2018 (<https://news.mongabay.com/2019/10/violence-against-indigenous-peoples-explodes-in-brazil/>).



Indigenous leaders meet with federal lawmakers Rodrigo Agostinho and Joenia Wapichana, the first Indigenous woman elected to the lower house of Congress, in the Chamber of Deputies to discuss the bill on mining in Indigenous lands. Both deputies say they oppose the bill and support Indigenous rights. Image courtesy of Marina Oliveira/Indigenist Missionary Council (CIMI).

The Indigenous protesters marched in the streets and met with lawmakers to express their opposition to two bills (<https://in.gov.br/en/web/dou/-/portaria-n-667-de-9-de-fevereiro-de-2022-379226707>) that would violate their rights if approved: PL 490/2007, which would set a cutoff date for Indigenous groups to claim their territory, and PL 191/2020, which would allow mining activity and hydroelectric generation inside Indigenous territories.

"Opening Indigenous lands [to mining] will harm the Indigenous population and the environment," Indigenous chief Aruan, president of the Pataxó and Tupinambá Indigenous Federation, told Mongabay by phone. "It will destroy our forest, the animals, the fish, and contaminate our sacred soil and waters." He added that mining on Indigenous lands would only profit large national and international companies, while generating conflicts, violence, and prostitution among Indigenous communities.

Rafael Modesto, a lawyer with CIMI, spoke to Mongabay by phone to question the legality of the PL 191/2020 bill and its threat to Indigenous rights. "It's completely unconstitutional," he said. "It's one of the worst evils for the Indigenous people and their land."

<https://twitter.com/ciminacional/status/1501658821978116101?s=21>

Despite the protests, Arthur Lira, president of the Chamber of Deputies, approved a measure to fast-track the mining bill as a matter of urgency. (<https://www.camara.leg.br/noticias/856872-plenario-vota-urgencia-do-projeto-sobre-mineracao-em-terras-indigenas-tema-sera-analisado-por-grupo-de-trabalho/>) Deliberation of the bill will now be delegated to a group of 20 deputies and voted on in April.

Aruan said the mining bill is a way of bypassing the Constitution — which prohibits mining on Indigenous lands — to exploit their territory, and the linchpin for the government's anti-environmental and anti-Indigenous agenda.

"This bill further encourages the genocide of Indigenous people, the invasion of our lands, and the exploitation of our resources," he said. "The Indigenous in Brazil preserve the environment. [The mining bill] is a risk to our planet and only serves Brasília's and the mining companies' interests."

According to a government report (<https://www.camara.leg.br/noticias/856872-plenario-vai-votar-urgencia-da-mineracao-em-terras-indigenas-projeto-sera-analisado-por-grupo-de-trabalho/>), Lira sped up the approval process to give the green light for mining potassium, a key element in the fertilizers used in Brazil's agriculture sector, one of the key drivers of the country's economy. President Jair Bolsonaro recently stated

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jPdFk-phsw>) he wants Brazil to be self-sufficient in fertilizer production and said the mining bill, backed by the influential agribusiness lobby, guarantees local production.

"Bolsonaro has used the conflict between Russia and Ukraine to justify the exploitation and mining on Indigenous lands," Haroldo Heleno, a regional coordinator at CIMI, told Mongabay by phone. Russia is currently Brazil's largest supplier of potassium as well as nitrogen and phosphorus, the three main elements for fertilizer production. However, an unpublished analysis (<https://twitter.com/RajaoPhD/status/1501192229796429833?s=20&t=zYNDf8NaAdtIms6N9GZEpw>) currently being conducted by Raoni Rajão and Bruno Manzolli, researchers at the Federal University of Minas Gerais, has so far found that almost all of Brazil's potassium reserves lie outside



Indigenous people gather in the street with a banner that reads "STF [Supreme Federal Court]: don't legalize the theft of our land and the death of our children." The protest was against a bill that would allow mining on Indigenous lands — an activity that is banned under Brazil's Constitution. Image courtesy of Tiago Miotto/Indigenist Missionary Council (CIMI).



Around 150 Indigenous men, women and children from eight ethnic groups peacefully protested in the street with banners and demonstrations of their cultures, rituals and music. Image courtesy of Tiago Miotto/Indigenist Missionary Council (CIMI).

Other bills being considered (<https://news.mongabay.com/2022/02/brazil-agrochemical-bill-nears-passage-in-bolsonaros-agenda-of-death/>) by Congress include one that loosens regulations on agrochemicals, which critics say will cause environmental destruction and harm consumer health. Another relaxes environmental licensing and encourages land grabbing, a practice associated with deforestation and forest fires in the Amazon.

After the protests in Brasília, Pacheco, the president of National Congress, promised to take care (<https://www.camara.leg.br/noticias/856942-apos-ato-pela-terra-pacheco-promete-cautela-do-congresso-na-analise-de-propostas-ambientais-polemicas/>) while analyzing environmental bills and weigh up their negative impacts.

Some deputies (<https://cimi.org.br/2022/03/mobilizacao-indigena-aprovacao-191/>) also reaffirmed their opposition to the bills and reiterated their support for Indigenous land rights.

However, after the measure to fast-track the mining bill passed overwhelmingly in a vote in the Chamber of Deputies, and with more bills up for consideration in the coming weeks, activists and protesters say they will continue to apply pressure on lawmakers to oppose legislation that impacts the environment and Indigenous rights. "We are marching to show that while we Indigenous people are alive, we will continue to fight for our rights," Aruan said. "We are resisting the Bolsonaro government who wants to take our rights and modify the Constitution to kill us, to allow mining to enter our territory, and break up our communities."



Indigenous groups join to practice rituals as well as sing and dance at Praça dos Três Poderes (Three Powers Plaza), which is surrounded by the three institutional powers of Brazil: the presidential office, the National Congress, and the Supreme Federal Court. Image courtesy of Marina Oliveira/Indigenist Missionary Council (CIMI).

Banner image: An Indigenous protester stands outside Funai, the federal government protection agency for Indigenous affairs. During the protests that took place over two days last week, Indigenous leaders attended audiences at Funai to oppose the bills that would put their communities and lands at risk. Image courtesy of Marina Oliveira/Indigenist Missionary Council (CIMI).

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