

38 Amazonian indigenous leaders murdered in Peru from 2013 to 2024

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Between 2013 and 2024, 38 leaders of Amazonian indigenous peoples in Peru were assassinated by mafias associated with illegal mining, logging and drug trafficking. Organizations advocating for the rights of indigenous peoples have reported similar widespread atrocities in Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia and Brazil.

Last month Mariano Ikasama, the leader of the Amazonian Kakataibo community, who was known for his work as a human rights defender, was found dead with signs of torture in the Ucayali region after being missing for 23 days.

The Peruvian newspaper *La República* reported the April 19, 2024 shooting of Victorio Dariquebe, the 61-year old park ranger of the Amarakaeri Communal Reserve in the Madre de Dios region in southeastern Peru, which borders Brazil and Bolivia.

The assassination of Amazonian leaders in Peru has been accompanied by the recent killing of three non-indigenous environmental activists, who were targeted for their work in protecting Amazonian forests and natural reserves against illegal gold mining in rivers and deforestation.

Indigenous peoples are waging a struggle to preserve the largest ecosystem on the planet: the basin of the mighty Amazon River, estimated at some 5.5 million km² – with 750,000 km² in Peru.

In Peru, there are 2,439 indigenous communities associated with 109 federations and nine organizations under the Interethnic Association for the Development of the Rainforest of Peru (Aidesep), as well as the autonomous territories of Awajún, Ese Eja Nation, and Shipibos. These communities safeguard over 18 million hectares of critical forest land.

In June, the Awajún attempted to block illegal mining in the Amazonas department by blocking the Comainas River with a cordon of canoes. Known as Defenders of

Diversity, they are committed to protecting their land and resources. Their website says:

Over the past few decades, ... large-scale projects like infrastructure development, extractive industries, and the cultivation of coffee and palm oil have been causing significant damage to the Amazon region. ... This has resulted in the destruction of native flora and fauna, as well as the traditional ways of life that have adapted to this environment and lived in harmony with it. ... The survival of these communities, along with the knowledge and practices they have developed over hundreds of years, is crucial in the fight against climate change.

In the department of Madre de Dios, where Victorio Dariquebe was murdered, the Andean Amazon Mining Project (MAAP) reports that gold mining in the region is harming local fauna, flora, and indigenous communities.

The MAAP report highlights deforestation, river contamination, and adverse effects on public health. MAAP estimates that 23,881 hectares were deforested in Madre de Dios between 2021 and September 2023.

Aidesep, explains the profound significance of the Amazon basin for global ecological balance:

“Given their vast extension, Peruvian forests constitute an important carbon reserve on a global scale. Forests generate climate resilience and ensure the provision of fundamental ecosystem services, such as water, and resources for food sustainability.”

It is clear, therefore, that the attack on the Amazonian

peoples' way of life and the destruction of their habitat has much wider repercussions.

Indigenous leaders have declared a state of emergency, accusing the Peruvian government of neglecting their requests for a study on the Amazon region's environmental quality. They also hold the government responsible for the serious crimes committed against their communities.

A rare instance of justice occurred on September 1, 2014, when four out of the five defendants accused of killing four Asháninka leaders in Ucayali were sentenced to 28 years and three months in prison. The case shed considerable light on the severity of unpunished crimes in the region.

Peru is a country where 13.1 percent of children under five years of age suffer from chronic malnutrition in general and 42.4 percent are affected by anemia. These 2023 figures for the country as a whole would without a doubt be much higher among children in indigenous communities in the Amazon.

Poverty and oppression, particularly of children in indigenous communities, is extreme. They have high school dropout rates, and are exploited by mafias who force them to work for low wages in gold mines along the rivers.

Girls in these communities face sexual abuse and forced prostitution, resulting in high incidence of rape cases and HIV transmission. The Peruvian Minister of Education Moran Quero has crassly attributed the rape of 500 Awajún girls to "cultural practice."

The Peruvian government engages in little more than handwringing when it comes to oppression of these communities, because it defends the powerful capitalist interests that profit off of the illegal mining, logging and drug trafficking that plague the Amazon region.

Former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro did not even bother to hide his initiatives to uproot indigenous communities in the Amazon. According to *Sage Journals Home*:

Under the ultraconservative Bolsonaro government, the State has been taken over by elites with rural and extractive capital who plan on exploiting the Amazon rain forest at any cost and see indigenous peoples as an obstacle to their goal. The military also has a noteworthy

position in this offensive, which strikes at the heart of what are considered human rights.

The organization Acampamento Terra Livre (ATL 2020) referred to Bolsonaro's policies as one "without indigenous people," that is, genocide.

Bolsonaro's successor, Workers Party (PT) President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, announced with great fanfare his intention to pursue a new policy in the Amazon region dedicated to protecting the environment and the indigenous populations. While his government has managed to reduce the rate of deforestation by half, the area controlled by illegal mining actually increased by seven percent last year.

With environmental and indigenous agencies confronting scant resources, the Amazonas mission has largely been delegated to the Brazilian military, which has a long record of oppressing indigenous populations. This includes the massacre of nearly 10,000 indigenous people in the Amazonas region under the military dictatorship that ruled Brazil from 1964 to 1985.

The history of unaddressed abuse and crimes committed against indigenous peoples constitutes a compelling indictment of the capitalist system. It is up to the international working class, in building socialism, to end these crimes.

Only the socialist conversion of the capitalist economy will permit respect of indigenous languages and culture, while providing full economic rights, universal education and proper housing.



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