



World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples - Venezuela : Yanomami

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Profile

The Yanomami inhabit the Orinoco and Sierra Parima region of southern Venezuela as well as the Amazonian region of Brazil. Arguably the most remote indigenous communities in the world, numbering over 7,000, the Yanomami have been able to preserve many of their traditions and maintain a symbiotic relationship with the environment.

Historical context

Although the Yanomami had developed economic and social systems that allowed for self-sustenance, contact with non-Yanomami has been detrimental to their traditional lifestyles. In 1992 the Brazilian government began expelling miners from Yanomami land within Brazilian territory; however this has resulted in the invasion of Yanomami land in Venezuela. In 2001, a book was published showing that American anthropologists may have acted negligently in the 1960s by administering a deadly measles immunization to hundreds of Yanomami.

Addressing another concern of the Yanomami, in 2006 the Supreme Court in Venezuela ruled for the expulsion of US-based New Tribes Mission who worked heavily in their territory.

Current issues

Venezuelan Yanomami are threatened by inadequate health services, political violence, economic exploitation and tourism. Their population has substantially reduced in recent decades, mainly as a result of diseases introduced by gold miners invading Yanomami land. Because of the lack of health services in southern Venezuela, hundreds of Yanomami have crossed over to the Brazilian

border looking for medical attention. The Yanomami Health Plan was in effect from 2012 to 2014 to treat various health conditions faced by Yanomami. This plan successfully treated over 6,000 patients.

A major threat to the health and wellbeing of Yanomami is the continued presence of thousands of illegal gold miners on their land. Not only have they contributed to the spread of diseases such as malaria, including previously uncontacted tribes with little immunity to these illnesses. Conflicts over land between indigenous communities and miners have led to frequent outbreaks of violence.

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