



Congress of the United States House of Representatives

June 1, 2020

Rodrigo Maia
Presidente da Câmara dos Deputados Gabinete 5 - Ed. Principal
70160-900 Brasília – DF
República Federativa do Brasil

Dear President Rodrigo Maia:

We, the undersigned Members of the United States House of Representatives, write to express our grave concern regarding the current and ongoing ecological and human rights crisis in the Amazon rainforest and the communities therein. As a major trade and diplomatic partner, We are concerned that the Brazilian government has changed long established laws and disregarded human rights in order to side with industry interests when it comes to mining, farming, and infrastructure projects, which have led to violent attacks against indigenous peoples going largely unpunished.

This letter comes at a moment in time when the Brazilian Congress considers PL 2633/2020, known as the “Land Grabbers Law”. This bill would legalize the theft of millions of hectares of public land that continues to be illegally invaded and deforested.¹ This bill incentivizes land grabbers and removes legal risks, which promotes a ‘Wild West’ of invaders who act with impunity in the name of profits.

We are concerned that the Brazilian government has continued to side with industry interests² when it comes to mining, farming, and infrastructure projects, which have led to violent attacks against indigenous peoples going largely unpunished.³ Considering PL 2633 reveals a priority to legitimize stolen lands, further supported by regulations like FUNAI N.9, which allows outsiders to claim land inside Indigenous Lands that have been submitted for legal protection⁴.

These regulations have grave consequences for not only the Amazon, but for the human and cultural survival of Indigenous Peoples. Deforestation within indigenous territories in the Amazon has increased 64 percent in the first four months of 2020 compared to the same time frame last year.⁵ Indigenous people’s land is not just a street or a park. It is integral to the exercise traditions, cultures, and religious beliefs. Each of these sites- be it from Chaco Canyon

¹ Kirkman, Alison. “People power succeeds in delaying vote that would put the future of the Amazon in jeopardy.” *Greenpeace*, 21 May, 2020. [Online](#).

² Boadle, Anthony. “Emboldened by Bolsonaro, armed invaders encroach on Brazil’s tribal lands” *Reuters*, 3 March 2019 [Online](#)

³ [Protecting indigenous lands protects the environment. Trump and Bolsonaro threaten both](#). WaPo. 3.18.19.

⁴ [FUNAI Normative Instruction 9](#)

⁵ [BBC News](#): Brazil’s Amazon: Surge in deforestation as military prepares to deploy.

in New Mexico, Mauna Kea in Hawaii, or Mundurukânia in Brazil – should be protected and preserved for our future generations, regardless of their respective origins or what natural resource they sit on top of.

Instead of protecting these sites, the Brazilian government has authorized more than 250,000 hectares of private agriculture inside indigenous territories. Landowners have registered more than 2,000 properties in indigenous areas in the Amazon, even including areas with uncontacted peoples. Recent analysis shows that 87% of indigenous territories pending demarcation are targeted for private occupation.

When such land illegally changes hands, indigenous leaders and Forest Guardians face threats of death. Zezico Guajajara. Ari Uru-eu-wau-wau. Paulo Paulino Guajajara. Laércio Guajajara. These are the names of only a few of the indigenous people who have been murdered in the past six months while trying to defend their land.⁶ Indigenous leaders and community members are facing increased threats, attacks, and killings as miners, loggers, and land invaders act under the assumption they can violate the law with impunity.⁷ According to Global Witness, in 2018, 164 people were murdered, more than 3 people per a week – and countless more criminalized – for defending their land.

We heard these concerns, among many others, when a delegation from the Brazilian Congress, including Joenia Wapichana, Erika Kokay, and Fernanda Melchionna, came to visit the United States in late February.⁸ Their stories of resistance and strength reminds us all of the importance of supporting a democratic Brazil that puts the rights of its indigenous people at the forefront of all discussions, and ensures a continued protection of the Amazon.

As a member of the United Nations, we remind you of the adopted United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples⁹, which states that the General Assembly is “convinced that control by indigenous peoples over developments affecting them and their lands, territories and resources will enable them to maintain and strengthen their institutions, cultures and traditions, and to promote their development in accordance with their aspirations and needs.” These goals are similarly enshrined in the Brazilian constitution, specifically Article 231, which acknowledges the government's duty to demarcate and protect indigenous lands. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report last year confirmed that climate-critical forest protection goes hand in hand with recognizing and respecting the land of rights of Indigenous People and local communities. We must honor our leadership within the United Nations and the promises laid down by our constitutions by ensuring that the rights of indigenous peoples are always not just protected, but promoted, across time.

We understand this bill to be highly detrimental to the Amazon rainforest, since it will legalize huge areas of public land that have already been illegally occupied and cut down. Worse still, we fear it incentivizes further destruction of Amazon forests. Our planet cannot afford this, especially not during a time of a global biodiversity and climate crises.

⁶ <https://amazonwatch.org/news/2020/0423-one-legal-victory-but-two-more-allies-have-fallen-in-brazil>

⁷ Cowie, Sam. “Jair Bolsonaro Praised the Genocide of Indigenous People. Now He’s Emboldening Attackers of Brazil’s Amazonian Communities.” *The Intercept*, 16 February, 2019 [Online](#)

⁸ [Haaland & Omar welcome delegation of Brazilian Congresswomen to the Hill](#)

⁹ [UNDRIP](#)

Given the potential consequences for regional rule of law, human rights, and the environment, we urge you to consider not allowing PL 2633/2020 to pass. Please give our request every full and fair consideration with your country's applicable laws, rules, and regulations.

Sincerely,



Deb Haaland
Member of Congress

/s/
Peter A. DeFazio
Member of Congress

/s/
Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress

/s/
Raúl Grijalva
Member of Congress

/s/
Jared Huffman
Member of Congress

/s/
Ro Khanna
Member of Congress

/s/
Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

/s/
Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress

/s/
Stephen F. Lynch
Member of Congress

/s/
James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

/s/
Grace L. Napolitano
Member of Congress

/s/
Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Member of Congress

/s/
Ilhan Omar
Member of Congress

/s/
Frank Pallone, Jr.
Member of Congress

/s/
Mark Pocan
Member of Congress

/s/
Ayanna Pressley
Member of Congress

/s/
Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress

/s/
Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress

/s/
Susan Wild
Member of Congress