



Uncontacted Indians on the Brazil-Peru border

Questions & answers

Who are the uncontacted Indians in this area?

There are several groups of uncontacted Indians living in the border region of Brazil (Acre state) and Peru (Ucayali department).

Brazil's Indian affairs department, FUNAI, believes there are at least four groups of uncontacted Indians in Acre state. On the Peru side of the border there are believed to be two uncontacted tribes.

We do not know what they call themselves, or what languages they speak.

They are probably descended from people who escaped the ravages of the rubber boom at the end of the 19th Century, when dozens of tribes were enslaved or wiped out. This is probably why the uncontacted groups today live in the remote headwaters of the region's rivers

How do they live?

They hunt forest birds and animals, fish, and collect fruits and nuts. Some also cultivate produce like bananas and manioc in small gardens. They live in communal houses made from thatch and wooden saplings.

How many are they?

It is difficult to give precise numbers. FUNAI estimates that on the Brazil side the population could be over 600.

What are the problems?

In Peru, illegal loggers are bulldozing roads into the lands of the uncontacted Indians, building camps and cutting down mahogany and other hardwood trees. Their presence is forcing these Indians to flee over the border to the state of Acre in Brazil. When in Brazil, they risk encroaching into the territory of other Indians, both contacted and uncontacted. This is likely to create conflict between different groups.

Drug traffickers are reported to be making and transporting cocaine from coca plants grown on the land of the uncontacted Indians in the Murunahua Reserve in Peru, and others have ransacked and occupied a government post on the Brazilian side of the border.

Where does the wood go?

Much of the mahogany logged in Peru is exported to the USA. Some is sold domestically.

Is this the first time an uncontacted people have made contact?

It is very unusual but not unknown for uncontacted groups to make contact with outsiders. In this case FUNAI believes the Indians have been forced to make contact because something has happened to push them into this region – probably the activities of the loggers and drug traffickers who have invaded their lands.

Do they face genocide?

Uncontacted Indians are highly vulnerable. They face heavily armed drug traffickers and loggers who will not hesitate to kill them if they attempt to defend their lands and villages. Contact with settled Indians and other outsiders risks the spread of viral infections such as the common cold, flu, measles and chicken pox. Such diseases can wipe out an entire tribe, as uncontacted Indians have little immunity to them.

If their territories are not properly protected they could well disappear forever. In Brazil some recently contacted people, such as the Akuntsu who now number just five individuals, are facing extinction. They are the survivors of a silent genocide by outsiders who are stealing their land and resources.

What are the authorities doing to protect them?

The Brazilian government has recognized and mapped out several territories for uncontacted Indians in Acre state. It has been monitoring them there for over 20 years and established guard posts in the area. However these have been closed down for several years.

The Peruvian government has created two reserves for uncontacted Indians in the region but not enough has been done to halt illegal logging there.

Both governments signed an agreement in March 2014 to co-operate on cross border monitoring and protection of uncontacted tribes' territories.

What rights do the uncontacted tribes have?

Under the international law on tribal peoples (known as ILO Convention 169), they have the right to own their traditional territories. Both Peru and Brazil have established reserves for the tribes in the border region, but neither recognize their land ownership rights.

What is their future?

If uncontacted Indians are left in peace and their lands protected they live well and thrive. The aerial photos of an uncontacted group in this area in 2010 show strong, healthy people.

However, they will only survive if governments uphold the law; protect their lands; and respect their right to remain isolated and lead a life of their choosing. Otherwise, like the Akuntsu and countless other tribes in the last 500 years, they face annihilation.

What is Survival doing?

Survival has launched [an urgent campaign](#) calling on the Peruvian and Brazilian governments to protect the territories of the uncontacted peoples.

They are some of the most vulnerable people on the planet, and they will survive only if their lands are protected.