



Chronology of Evidence of Uncontacted Indians Fleeing from Peru to Brazil



‘Arrows are the identity cards of tribes. Each tribe makes them in a different way.’

José Carlos Meirelles, FUNAI, Brazil

INTRODUCTION

FUNAI, the Brazilian government's Indian Affairs Department, has been reporting, since 2004, that uncontacted Indians from Peru have been fleeing across the border to Brazil. FUNAI's experts have gathered evidence that suggests they are doing so because their lands in Peru have been invaded by illegal loggers.

The same experts have also alerted the authorities in both countries on numerous occasions to the tragic consequences that may result from this situation.

Survival, in consultation with FUNAI's team on the Brazil border, has put together a chronology of events in this region. It shows increasing movement of uncontacted Indians in the last few years, including several sightings by FUNAI staff, who have also collected a considerable number of arrows belonging to them. From all this they conclude that there is clearly a migratory movement of uncontacted Indians from the Peruvian to the Brazilian side of the border.

THREATS AND RISKS

Uncontacted Indians face the serious risk of being made extinct if they come into contact with loggers and other outsiders. Introduced diseases are the biggest killer of uncontacted tribal people, who have not developed immunity to viruses such as influenza, measles and chicken pox, which most other societies have.

In Peru, more than 50% of the previously uncontacted Nahua (or Yora) tribe were wiped out following oil exploration on their land in the early 1980s, and the same tragedy engulfed the Murunahua (or Chitonahua) in the mid-1990s after they were contacted by illegal mahogany loggers. One of the Murunahua survivors, Jorge, was shot at and lost an eye during first contact. He told a Survival researcher, 'We left the forest when the loggers made contact with us. That was when the disease hit us. It killed half of us. My aunt died, my nephew died. Half of my people died. The old people were particularly badly hit.'

The migration of uncontacted Indians from Peru across the Brazilian border may also result in increased competition for resources and conflict between the migrants and Indians already there.

'We left the forest when the loggers made contact with us. That was when the disease hit us. It killed half of us.'



Jorge, a Murunahua man, Peru

WHAT PERU'S GOVERNMENT CAN DO

We urge the Peruvian government to protect uncontacted Indians' land by removing all loggers and prohibiting the entry of any other outsiders and any form of natural resource extraction in areas where they live.

Peru's constitution guarantees tribal peoples' land rights, as does the International Labour Organisation's Convention 169, which Peru has signed. Peru's government must uphold these laws. At present, uncontacted Indians are at huge risk and face extinction.



Nahua Indian, Peru

CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

1987

FUNAI creates the 'Frente de Proteção Etnoambiental Rio Envira' (FPERE), coordinated by José Carlos Meirelles. The post is situated 5km from the Peru border, on the Envira River. The remit of the FPERE team is to identify and protect the areas inhabited by uncontacted Indians. Contact is only to be established if the survival of the Indians is at risk.

DECEMBER 1998

The indigenous territory called 'Kampa and Uncontacted Indians of the Envira River' is ratified and signed into law by the Brazilian government.

JULY 2004

Meirelles meets with Peru's ambassador to Brazil, Hernán Couturier, and expresses concern that uncontacted Indians are fleeing across the border from Peru into Brazil. This concern is based on Meirelles's experiences at the FPERE post on the Envira River.

OCTOBER 2004

The indigenous territory 'Alto Taraucá' in Acre state, inhabited by uncontacted Indians, is ratified and signed into law.

SEPTEMBER 2005

The indigenous territory 'Uncontacted Indians Riozinho do Alto Envira', in Acre state, is identified and demarcated by FUNAI.

1987

1998

2004

2005

NOVEMBER 2005

The FPERE team spots mahogany boards floating down the Envira River from Peru. The Envira River has its source in Peru. This is a clear sign of logging activities on the Peruvian side of the border.

FEBRUARY 2006

FPERE spots mahogany boards and oil containers floating down the Envira River from Peru. The oil brand and signatures on the mahogany boards lead the team to conclude they have come from Peru and that illegal logging is taking place there. Given that the boards are signed, the team concludes that there must be more than one company operating (hence the need to distinguish one set of boards from the other).

The FPERE team also sees uncontacted Indians and report that their hairstyle is totally different from the hairstyle of the Indians who usually inhabit the region. This is a clear sign that the Indians have migrated recently from Peru.

Meirelles alerts FUNAI and other authorities to the risk of conflict between indigenous groups in the region. He also publicises the problem that 'mahogany extraction in the Brazil-Peru border may trigger a 'war' between different ethnic groups and result in Indians from both countries dying.'

APRIL 2007

FUNAI publishes a bill creating a reserve for uncontacted Indians in the state of Acre, called the 'Riozinho do Alto Envira'.

JUNE 2007

A small group of uncontacted Indians take tools and clothes from a house in the village of Santa Maria da Liberdade in Brazil, the last colonist settlement in the headwaters of the Envira River, very close to the Peruvian border. Meirelles believes these uncontacted Indians are from Brazil and that they are being forced to move downriver as their traditional territories are invaded by Indians fleeing from Peru.

'I believe this fact is related to the forced migration of autonomous groups in Peru, caused by mahogany exploration in the headwaters of the Juruá, Purus and Envira. We are certain of the existence of three [uncontacted] groups in the region,' says Meirelles.

2006

2007

JULY 2007

A group of approximately 50 uncontacted Indians is seen entering an abandoned Asháninka village. Their hairstyle, short and bowl-shaped, makes it clear they are not uncontacted Indians traditionally from Brazil and Meirelles believes once again that these are Indians from Peru, fleeing illegal loggers. He alerts FUNAI's president. His greatest fear is potential conflict between the different Indian groups.

OCTOBER 2007

The FPERE team hears cries in the forest during an expedition to the headwaters of the Xinane River, very near the Peruvian border. Later, with the help of Google Earth, they find that a clearing has been made in a part of the forest where there have never been any clearings before. This leads the team to believe they have been made by 'newcomers'.

MAY 2008

The FPERE team photographs 75 'malocas' or communal houses belonging to uncontacted Indians in three different locations. Some of these houses belong to two tribes that were previously known to the team. But others – two malocas in the headwaters of the Xinane River, where there were never any malocas before – must belong to a new group.

JULY 2008

An arrow is shot at a member of the FPERE team. The arrow is different from the arrows seen and made by the uncontacted Indians of this region, leading the team to conclude it must have been made by Indians that have fled from Peru. Meirelles meets the Peruvian ambassador to Brazil and talks about the need and urgency to protect uncontacted Indians.

AUGUST 2008

Several arrows are shot at the FPERE team while they fish near their post. The arrows are retrieved by the team and they conclude, based on the way they are made, that they belong to uncontacted Indians from Peru. They were made using nylon thread previously taken from the FPERE post, which leads FUNAI specialists to conclude they were made by Indians who have recently migrated and therefore do not yet grow their own cotton.

The Indians also take bananas from the post's garden. The team concludes that if they weren't migrants from Peru, they would have their own gardens and would not need to do this.

2008

1-7 SEPTEMBER 2008

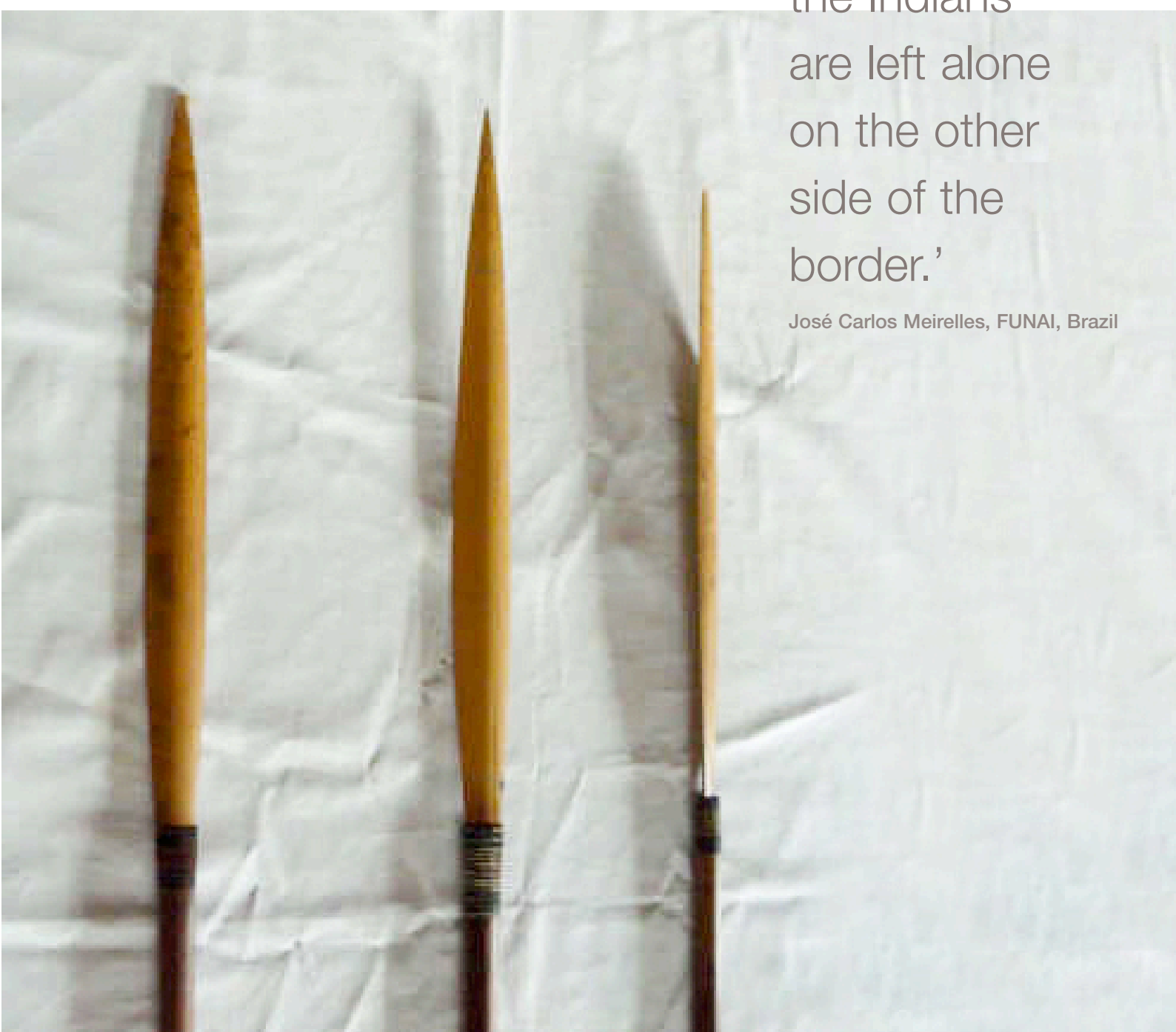
Another arrow is found. It is similar to the arrows found in September 2007 and the FPERE team concludes it belongs to uncontacted Indians fleeing from Peru to Brazil. As Meirelles says, 'Arrows are the identity cards of tribes. Each tribe makes them in a different way.'

14 SEPTEMBER 2008

The FPERE team is shot at with arrows in the vicinity of the post. Later, they find footprints of six or seven people. At least one of them is a woman, judging from foot size. From the material and length of the arrows found it is clear they must have been made by uncontacted Indians from Peru. The tip is made of a certain type of bamboo that can only be found in Peru or the headwaters of the Xinane, where the team has spotted two malocas belonging to Peruvian Indians. The arrows are smaller than the ones made by Brazilian Indians.

'The collection of arrows on my table is piling up... The situation will only be resolved when the Indians are left alone on the other side of the border.'

José Carlos Meirelles, FUNAI, Brazil



FURTHER PHOTOGRAPHIC EVIDENCE



Mahogany boards found by FPERE team on the Envira River.



Oil containers found by FPERE team on the Envira River.



Meirelles with some of the arrows belonging to uncontacted Indians fleeing from Peru to Brazil.

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