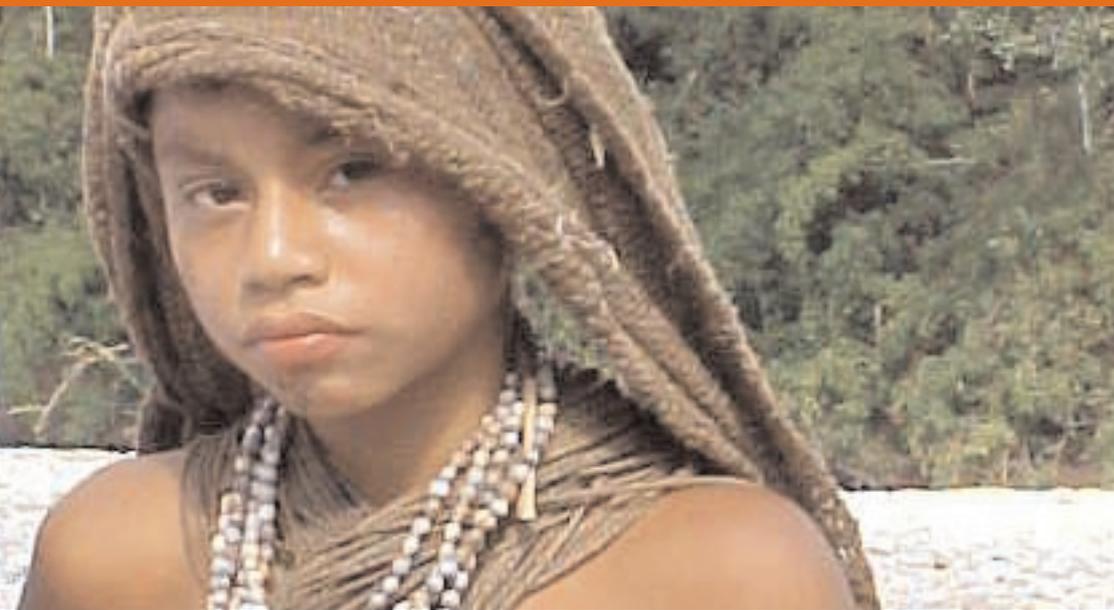


Uncontacted Indians in Peru



'They all died. My uncle and cousins died as they were walking along... their eyes started to hurt, they started to cough, they got sick and died right there in the forest. Some were small children. They put all the bodies in a big hole and everyone was wailing and crying.'

Shocorua, Nahua woman, contacted in the mid-1980s, Peru.

WHO ARE THEY?

The uncontacted Indians of Peru live in remote parts of the Amazon, in isolation from mainstream society and other tribal people. Although some may have had contact with outsiders during the rubber boom which decimated the Indian population in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and now live in isolation in order to ensure their survival, others may never have had contact at all.

It is estimated there are about 15 different uncontacted tribes.

These include the **Isconahua, Cacataibos, Murunahua (or Chitonahua), Mastanahua (or Curanjeños), Mashco-Piro, Machiguenga, Nanti and Asháninka**. Each tribe speaks its own language.



Isolated Nanti woman and child, Peru

HOW MANY ARE THERE?

Estimates of the number of uncontacted Indians vary widely, but it is certain that some tribes are in danger of extinction. Sometimes the uncontacted groups are isolated members of larger tribes, the majority of whom have had contact for many years; most Asháninka, for example, have had contact with outsiders for centuries.

Cacataibos: 150-200 people

Mashco-Piro: 250-600 people

Nanti: 130 people

Asháninka: 1,250 people

HOW DO THEY LIVE?

The majority are nomadic hunter-gatherers and live in the rainforest, moving across very large areas, fishing and hunting many kinds of wild game. Turtle eggs, which draw the tribes to the riverbanks in the summer when the water is low, are a particularly important source of food. Some also grow crops.



Asháninka woman, Peru



Puerto Paz, occasional home to recently contacted Mastanahua, River Curanja, Peru.



WHERE ARE THEY?

The majority of Peru's uncontacted Indians live in the south-eastern Amazon, in the provinces of Madre de Dios and Ucayali. Many of these people are descended from survivors of the rubber boom, which swept through the region a century ago and killed 90% of the Indian population. Only those living in the remotest headwaters survived. Other isolated groups are known in the centre, north-east and far north of Peru's Amazon basin.

WHAT ARE THE THREATS FACING THEM?

Despite five reserves being set aside for the uncontacted tribes, these are continually invaded by outsiders. This poses an enormous threat to the Indians because they have no immunity to outsiders' diseases and as a result any form of contact can be fatal. The presence of outsiders on their land also leads to violent conflict, and unknown numbers of uncontacted Indians have died in recent years after encounters with outsiders.

Illegal logging is taking place in many of the isolated Indians' territories, and can have devastating consequences; more than 50% of the Murunahua tribe died in the 1990s after they were contacted by loggers. Peru has some of the last big mahogany reserves in the world; over 80% is exported to the USA.

70% of the Peruvian Amazon has been opened up by the Peruvian government to oil exploration, and some of this includes land inhabited by uncontacted Indians. Four of the five reserves created for them have oil lots superimposed on them, whilst all five proposed reserves have oil lots superimposed on them too. Oil exploration is particularly dangerous because it opens up previously remote areas to other outsiders, such as loggers and colonists. Following oil exploration on their land in the 1980s, subsequent contact with outsiders wiped out half the Nahua tribe.

Other threats include gold-mining, the construction of new roads, and missionaries reportedly trying to make contact with the tribes.

WHAT DO THEY SAY?

'When the loggers made contact with us, we came out of the rainforest. That was when the disease began. The disease killed us. Half of us died. My aunt died, my nephew died. Half of my people died.' Jorge, Murunahua man, contacted in the mid-1990s, Peru.



'When the missionaries came we heard the motorboat and I said, 'What's happening? A motor-boat! People are coming!' That's what I said. When we saw them, we went and hid, deeper in the jungle, and then the missionaries started saying, 'Come, come!'

Tomás (above), Mastanahua man, contacted 2001-3, Peru.

HOW CAN I HELP?

To find out how to help, please visit: www.survival-international.org/tribes/isolatedperu

We help tribal peoples defend their lives, protect their lands and determine their own futures.

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