

## **GA4: Humanitarian**

*Addressing the rights of the  
indigenous population in the Amazon*

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**Issue:** Addressing the rights of the indigenous population in the Amazon

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## Introduction

The Amazon has been settled by humans for over 30.000 years. Ever since humans arrived at the rainforest they have integrated themselves into the ecosystem. Over time the forest and its environment became an indispensable part of their lives. However, these people have been chased away from lands that they have inhabited for thousands of years by gold miners, loggers, and other elements that seek to exploit the rainforest and harm the environment for their profits. Now, most of the indigenous people in the Amazon live on reservations, but there are still a number of tribes that live without any connection to the outside world. It is also wise to note that among the indigenous people, there are hundreds of different ethnic groups and tribes. As the theme of Hisar JMUN 2023 is combatting polarization, this agenda item will work on bringing humanity together with a goal everyone can agree on: protecting the environment.

## Definition of Key Terms

**Ecosystem:** A community of interacting organisms and the physical environment.

**Indigenous people:** Descendants of the people living in the Amazon before the arrival of the Europeans.

**Tribe:** A group of people sharing the same language, culture, and characteristics

**Deforestation:** Purposeful clearing of forest land.

**Reservation:** A portion of land that the government recognizes as belonging to the native people.

**Nomadic People:** People who migrate a few times a year to different places depending on weather, food, etc.

**Constitution:** The fundamental laws and principles governing a nation

**Assimilation:** A culture losing its defining qualities over time due to the influence of another culture.

**Resguardo:** Amazonian indigenous reservation

**Encroachment:** intrusion on a person's territory, rights, etc.

## General Overview

Spanish colonizers were the first Europeans to explore the Amazon in 1541. After that, the Spanish and Portuguese divided the Amazon between themselves. Before the arrival of the Europeans, there were more than 7 million indigenous people living in the Amazon. Over time, however, various outbreaks of diseases brought by Europeans, slavery, and war nearly wiped out these people. After various South American nations gained their independence, the rainforest was divided between Brazil, Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, Colombia, Guyana, Suriname, and Venezuela, as well as French Guyana which is an overseas territory of France.

In all of these countries, illegal deforestation became a major problem ever since the 1960s. From loggers to poachers, many people and organizations seeking easy profit, and access to the vast raw materials and wildlife of the rainforest, took what they wanted from the forest without caring about the environment. As a result, an estimated 13% of the rainforest has been completely lost. Efforts to protect the rainforest only started in the 1990s, when the extent of the damage became clear.

Due to both direct and indirect government pressure, the indigenous people of the Amazon have been forced out of their nomadic lifestyle and have been mostly resettled in reservations, which are called *resguardos*. Unfortunately many struggled to adapt to this lifestyle of permanent settlement. Now, the indigenous people of the Amazon face many problems ranging from poverty to encroachment of their territory by elements hostile to their and the rainforest's interests. Although there are many laws and constitutions guaranteeing the rights and freedoms of the indigenous peoples, in practice most of these are not being implemented and people in reservations suffer from poverty and all kinds of problems resulting from neglect.

## Major Parties Involved and Their Views

**Brazil:** The country controlling the greatest share of the Amazon rainforest, with around 60%. Brazil is also the country where deforestation has been the most severe, as most of the illegal activity in the Amazon comes from Brazil. The Brazilian government's lack of clear goals has further exacerbated the situation. About 13% of Brazil's entire territory is made up of indigenous reserves, but conditions generally remain poor.

**Peru:** The country with the second largest share of the Amazon. Around 5 million indigenous Amazonians live in Peru. Since 1978 the government has recognized their rights and ceded a fifth of the Peruvian Amazon to create reservations for these people. However, the concessions were not enough and a substantial portion of the people still don't have legal rights over where they traditionally live.

**Colombia:** The country with the third largest share of the Amazon. Almost 2 million Amazonian natives live in Colombia. Almost a third of the country is filled with reservations; about 800,000 people live in these areas. The Colombian constitution recognizes the rights of the native people. However mining, deforestation, and resource extraction are extremely common in reservation areas, so in practice, the government is lacking in its defense of indigenous rights.

**Venezuela:** Like Colombia, Venezuela has a constitution that defends and enshrines the rights of the indigenous people. They are guaranteed representation in the Venezuelan national assembly. They face similar challenges to Colombian natives, but unlike the Colombians, they don't have reservations. Instead, native municipalities are designated as such.

**Ecuador:** While the exact number is disputed, there are well over a million indigenous people living in Ecuador. Natives exert a strong influence on the country's politics due to their relatively large number compared to the non-indigenous people, with their influence directly helping the ousting of a previous president. The natives still suffer many problems though, such as petroleum extract harming the environment and a wage gap between the native and non-native people of Ecuador.

**Bolivia:** Native people make up somewhere between 20-60% percent of the Bolivian population. The lands that Bolivian natives hold exceed 11 million hectares at the moment. While Bolivian natives were historically repressed, through multiple social and political movements throughout the second half of the 20th century they gained representation and rights, culminating in the election of an indigenous president in 2006. Bolivian natives also gained a greater amount of autonomy than any other country in South America.

## Timeline of Events

1492	<i>Christopher Columbus discovers the American Continent.</i>
1541	<i>First European expedition into the Amazon.</i>
1810	<i>Colombia and Chile gained independence.</i>
1811	<i>Venezuela gains independence.</i>
1821	<i>Peru gains independence.</i>
1822	<i>Brazil gains independence.</i>
1978	<i>Peru passes law recognizing natives' rights to their land.</i>
1980	<i>Colombian natives abandon armed struggle and</i>

	<i>embrace peaceful change.</i>
1988	<i>Brazil adopts a constitution protecting indigenous rights.</i>
1989	<i>ILO convention 169.</i>
2006	<i>Bolivia elects an indigenous president.</i>
2007	<i>UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.</i>

## Treaties and Events

**The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)** codified the rights of the indigenous population in a country in a non-binding resolution, such as the protection of native identities and customs, maintaining native institutions, natives' right to healthcare, education, etc.

**The International Labor Organization (ILO)'s 107th Convention** recognized and aimed to protect indigenous rights and address the problems these people were facing. ILO's 169th convention revised the decisions taken here.

**ILO's 169th Convention** recognized the importance of native peoples' identity and forbade assimilationist policies. Importantly, it provided a legal framework for natives to fight against encroaching elements such as loggers and miners.

**The American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples** recognized the right of indigenous people to self-determination, healthcare, education, protection of their culture, etc. More importantly, the Organization of American States (OAS) adopted this declaration, which includes Venezuela, Colombia, and Ecuador.

## Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

The UNDRIP and ILO convention significantly improved the state of indigenous rights. Indigenous people also fought for their rights within their countries, which also resulted in many nations adopting laws and constitutions that recognized their freedoms and needs. Although great progress has been made in this field, loggers, miners, and other predatory elements use loopholes to continue their operations in the Amazon. Corrupt elements within governments also regularly turn a blind eye towards deforestation in exchange for bribes and due to other methods of coercion. Governments' half-hearted efforts and lack of coordination also make military

operations impossible, such as what happened with Brazil's operation in 2020. The conditions in reservations also generally remain poor as they are generally the areas with the highest level of poverty in their respective countries.

## Possible Solutions

Addressing issues within reservations. Most natives have to resort to informal work to find money to survive. Granting these people employment would do a lot to improve their lives. Illegal deforestation is also an issue that must be addressed. Reservations need better security to stop encroachment on natives' territory.

Clamping down on deforestation. The endless deforestation of the Amazon is the source of many problems that the indigenous people face today. As military operations by various countries have failed, the use of UN peacekeepers to root out the loggers is not out of the question, albeit with governments' approval. Governments must also take further action against deforestation on their own such as by developing infrastructure near the Amazon to be able to increase their control over the area and rapidly intervene if necessary.

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