
[The Roraima Amazon forest fire in Brazil](#)

The state of Roraima, in northern Brazil is on fire. A disaster similar to the recent fires in Indonesia is taking place and government responsibility is also similar. As in Indonesia, the Brazilian Amazon is continuously being set on fire to open up the area to "development", through a process beginning with road-building. Such roads serve as vehicles to government-promoted colonization processes, which entail the destruction of forests through logging, conversion to agriculture and cattle raising, mining, hydropower development, etc. In this scenario, fires don't "occur"; they are the cheapest and more commonly-used mechanism to clear the land for "development". The Brazilian government -as its Indonesian colleague- knows this perfectly well and until now has been unwilling to put a stop to this practice. They must therefore be held responsible for such destruction.

The world media is pointing out at a number of consequences of this ongoing catastrophe: biodiversity loss, climate change, greenhouse effect. However true, the emphasis on these "global" consequences hide the tragedy that this implies for local indigenous populations, such as the Yanomami, for whom the forest is everything. Cultures such as these can only survive with the forest, which provides them with food, medicine, shelter, spirituality. It is their home and it is being destroyed. For them, this is Hiroshima. Within the current development model they are the only ones whose interest lies in the protection of the forest. For the economists that run the world, both forests and indigenous peoples stand in the way of "progress". In consequence, policies are set up for their destruction, both physical and cultural.

It is therefore obvious that the Amazon fires will not be extinguished with more firemen, military or aircrafts. Maybe this specific Roraima fire will be put off after it has consumed most of the state's forest, but it will be started again elsewhere. For a solution to be found, the world community -and in the first place the Brazilian people- must support the plight of the real owners of the Amazon -the indigenous peoples- and help them achieve the true recognition of their land rights. Only then will the world be able to rest assured that the Amazon will provide it with its global services.