

March 22, 2020

**Open Letter to Brazilian Authorities and Society at Large  
on the Dangers of the Covid-19 Pandemic for Isolated Indigenous Peoples**

As specialists on the indigenous peoples of the Amazon, the members of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America (SALSA)\* are acutely aware of the tragic health impacts of contagious diseases on indigenous communities in general, and isolated indigenous peoples in particular. History shows us, and indigenous peoples have told us, about the devastation brought on by epidemics such as measles, smallpox, whooping cough and influenza, which have decimated or extinguished entire populations.

SALSA is therefore deeply concerned about the dangers that the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic poses to the indigenous peoples of Brazil, especially isolated peoples, who are among the most vulnerable. We support the initiative by Brazil's federal Indian agency, FUNAI, in suspending research authorizations in federally recognized indigenous lands. We also hope that FUNAI will do much more to halt the recent spike in illegal invasion of indigenous territories by outsiders such as miners, loggers and ranchers as well as religious missionaries.

However, SALSA condemns FUNAI's recent policy change allowing regional directors, often political appointees without adequate technical expertise, to initiate contact with isolated peoples, thus overturning robust, existing protective policies developed within the Department of Isolated Indians by experienced field agents. We are also deeply worried about the appointment of a former religious missionary to head the Department of Isolated Indians, given the long history of negative impacts on indigenous societies' health and culture by some religious missionaries in the past.

According to health specialists, coronavirus can be transmitted and spread by those who do not show symptoms. Thus SALSA considers any unwarranted attempt to approach immunologically vulnerable people in the midst of such an unpredictable pandemic, especially without the input and participation of experienced field agents, to be reckless and potentially catastrophic, and urges Brazilian and international authorities to treat any lethal consequences of such approach as murder or genocide.

SALSA will continue to follow the situation very closely and would appreciate any clarifications or response from FUNAI, the Ministry of Justice, or other Brazilian authorities.



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**\*The Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America (SALSA)** is an international professional association for anthropologists specializing in lowland regions of South America. SALSA's main goals are to foster sound and ethical research on the peoples and environments of lowland South America, and to promote the education of students and the general public on issues that we study. For the organization, the well-being of lowland South America's vulnerable peoples is of central concern. As anthropologists and regional specialists, we insist on accuracy in scientific research, integrity in interpretation, and defense against misuse of academic writings. We support indigenous leaders, organizations, and fellow scholars who focus the spotlight of public attention on the realities of life for native people in lowland South America and elsewhere, in the latter's struggles to secure the rights and resources they need to survive and thrive as indigenous citizens of the 21st century.