

In June 2009 Davi Kopenawa Yanomami, a shaman from one of the communities of the 16,000 Yanomami Indians who live in the north of Brazil, near the frontier with Venezuela, travelled to Europe to talk to politicians and the press. He wanted to ensure that an indigenous voice was heard in the run-up to the Copenhagen conference in December 2009. The following are extracts from some of the interviews he gave.

A Farida Akhtar

Benny Haerlin

Carlos Correa

David Quist

E Johnson Ekpere

Franческа Rodriguez

German Velez

Hope Shand

Ibrahim Ouedraogo

Jack Kloppenburg

K Joseph Eve

Laxmanma

M Lorenzo Meulas Hurtado

Davi Yanomami



Photo: Survival International

Have you noticed the climate changing in the Brazilian Amazon?

We who live in the Amazon forest are seeing the smoke from pollution. It is coming into our land. The rain is arriving late and the sun is behaving strangely. The world is ill. The lungs of the sky are polluted. So this climate change you talk about is dangerous for us, dangerous for us all. We know it is happening. We are shamans and we care for the sun and the moon, the light and the darkness, and all that exists in the universe. Our shamans know that the planet is changing, and this is dangerous for us all. If you carry on killing people and you continue to destroy nature to take out all the oil, the minerals and the wood, our planet will become ill and we will all die, burned or drowned.

Why do you think people from outside are doing so much damage to the forests?

The white man has strong roots in the city. He cannot change. He is driven mad with desire for land. He always wants to take out more and more from the land so that the city can grow. He thinks only of things under and on the ground: oil, gold, minerals; roads, cars, trains. He cannot be happy. The Yanomami are different. We think and we speak with the soul of the land, the water, the rivers, the mountains, the moon, the stars and the sun.

In 1992 the Yanomami won a big victory. The Brazilian government threw out the 20,000

gold-panners who had invaded Yanomami land, and declared that land a large reserve for the Yanomami, covering 9.4 million hectares. What is the situation of the Yanomami today?

Since President Lula took over in 2002, he has done nothing for the Yanomami or the other Indians. He promised to do things and he hasn't done them. I think he has forgotten us. We have 3,000 gold-panners back on our land. And he has done nothing. It is the responsibility of the government to get them out. We have rights. We are the owners of the land, and the federal police must remove the miners.

White politics is difficult for us Indians, and for you *napë* (non-Indians) as well. What has politics done for you *napë*? What do you know about the political parties, deputies and senators? Only they know about themselves. And they are charlatans, they use politics to get their hands on the land.

Do you have other enemies today?

The soya farmers have arrived. They began their attack on the land of our relatives in the Xingu National Park. They have caused a lot of destruction there. They have put an end to the forests. They are doing the same elsewhere. But they haven't so far dared to plant soya on our land. And we will stop them. At the moment, our enemies are still the big cattle companies and the gold-panners.



Do you have any other problems?

We are worried about the big mining companies. Governors, senators and deputies are trying to get a new mining law through Congress and to have Lula sign it. They are claiming mining rights on 60 per cent of the land that lies under our forest. That's why we're furious with Lula. But perhaps our biggest problem of all now is health. The government isn't doing enough. The government doesn't want to improve our health care, and there are lots of corrupt people stealing money which is meant for us and for our health. The health equipment, the medicines and the medical teams stay in the city and don't reach the Yanomami.

What can be done to stop the destruction?

We must make an alliance, all the indigenous people struggling together against mining. And not just indigenous people. This union would be very weak with just indigenous people. We must come together with leaders of other people, non-Indians, to hold a huge meeting to fight against the mining

companies that invade us. Unity is what will make us strong. We will fight, not with the force of arms or of money, but of nature.

What is your message to the world on climate change?

There are about to be global talks about climate change. The error of the *napë* is that they take out the riches from the land. They cannot do this. Why? Because the land is sacred. You cannot destroy it because the heart of our Yanomami *urihi* (forest) is the lungs of the world. It is very important for the governments of the world to listen to us, the indigenous people who have lived on the planet for thousands of years. We have to help the world when it is crying out, when there is no rain, or when there is a lot of thunder and too much rain. The *shapiripë* (shamanic spirits) know how to help the world. They have defended nature for a long time, not just for the Yanomami but for the whole world, for the planet. Everybody, the politicians and the UN, have to listen to and respect the earth and stop destroying it by taking out the riches.

GOING FURTHER

<http://www.survival-international.org/tribes/yanomami>

<http://www.socioambiental.org>



Davi Kopenawa Yanomami, indigenous leader and shaman, surrounded by children in Demini, Brasil

N **diogou**
Fall

O **Sharif**
mar

P **João**
edro
Stédile

Q **Darrin**
Qualman

R **amón**
Vera

S **Daycha**
iripatira

T **im** Lang

U **Irlich**
Oslender 31

V **alentina**
Henmeler
Maiga

W **Melaku**
orede

X **ue**
Dayuan

Y **Davi**
anomami



Photo: Fiona Watson/Survival International