"from this moment on, the Yanomami people, will be in permanent assembly until their territory is definitively demarcated."

THE FIRST PERMANENT YANOMAMI ASSEMBLY 1986
YANOMAMI ASSEMBLY 1986
YANOMAMI

For more than a decade, the CCPY - Commission for the creation of the Yanomami Park - has been struggling to secure the survival of the great Yanomami people. And at times this struggle has been difficult and lonely. To understand this, perhaps it may be important to know that the Yanomami people inhabit one of the most coveted regions of the planet. They are a people with almost no contacts with the fronts of Brazilian conquest and civilization, but have experienced sad visions of this so-called national society. Inhabiting the most remote part of the known map of Brazil, these our kin have a large population. Part of their population lives on the Brazilian side and part on the Venezuelan side of the frontier. Right in the frontier region between the two countries. It is there, among the rivers and mountains that the Yanomami People live. And have lived for millions of years!

It is there, in the Federal Territory of Roraima, and the Northern part of the State of Amazonas, an area where the interests of mining companies and large national development projects are beginning to appear, that the Yanomami Territory lies.

It was in thinking about these grave threats that the National Coordinating Committee of UNI - the Union of Indian Nations, and the staff of the CCPY began conversations in são Paulo. It was from these conversations that the decision was made to look for a way to assist the great Yanomami People in coming to the public, gaining a voice and taking the lead in this struggle for the demarcation of their territory. Quickly we went from there to a meeting with Daviwê, a Yanomami leader, and plans for the first Assembly of the Yanomami People, at the Demini Post.

But how to undertake a formal meeting, with non-indigenous people, and representatives of the government? How to bring together leaders from distant Yanomami malocas (center of habitation)? It was a lot of work, but work worth the effort. What this First Yanomami Assembly meant for all those who are in this struggle and principally for the Yanomami People, who could speak for the first time with high-level representatives of the Brazilian government: a Senator and a head of the cabinet of the Ministry of the Justice, as well a member of the Justice and Peace Commission, give us strength to advance more and more in the organization of our Indigenous People. Moreover, it is clear above all that we are not alone!

And for you to have an idea of all that I have been saying about this first Yanomami Assembly, continue, reading URIHI. Se how these Yanomami kin have already defined their territory, know about their projects of the future...

Ailton Krenak
"we are talking together, it's the first time that the Yanomami are talking together, here in this meeting, so that we can begin to have a common understanding. It is good." (Esmeraldo Tisiporatheri, of Surucucus)

From 15 to 17 March 1986, for the first time in history, an assembly of Yanomami Indians was held, bringing together tuxaus (indigenous chiefs) and representatives from 14 Yanomami Communities of the Federal Territory of Roraima and the State of Amazonas. The historic meeting took place at the Demini Indigenous Post, at kilometer 211 of the Northern Perimeter highway (Amazonia) at the foot of the Serra dos Ventos, a region called Watoriktheri by the Yanomami.

Also present were representatives and chiefs of the Macuxi Indians of the Surumu, Maturaca and Mau regions, in Roraima.

Approximately 100 Yanomami Indians, from villages located in distant points of the Federal Territory of Roraima and the State of Amazonas, came to Watoriktheri. From the region of the Serra de Surucucus (Parima), Roraima, came representatives of the Tisiporatheri, Xirimifiktheri, Topolatheri, Byrysitheri, and the Taremútheri.

“We are human being like them (the white people). We also know the history of our ancestors. We have no written history, but we keep it in our memory”
(Davi Kopenawa Yanomami)

From Amazonia came representatives of the Wawanawetheri (rio Maiá), and the Masiributheri (rio Cauaburis), Yanomami Indians of the rio Toototobi and from Ajuriacaba (rio Demini), and from the Watoriktheri village (at kilometer 217 of the Northern Perimeter highway).
From the rio Catrimani (Roraima) came representatives of the wakataautheri; from the rio Pacu (Roraima), the Pacutheri. From kilometer 133 and 135 of the Northern Perimeter highway came the Opiktheri, and from the Ericó and Uraricaí rivers (Roraima), near the Santa Rosa mine, came the Ericoytheri.

"Justice has to open its eyes to the suffering of the Indians. Like there on the Serra there are machines throwing out oil, contaminating our river, the water that we drink, and bringing sickness. So it is. And it will happen here too, if the authorities don't take action."
(Gilberto Lima Macuxi)

SPECIAL GUESTS

A committee composed of special guests of the Yanomami arrived on 15 March 1986 at the foot of the Serra dos Ventos to participate in the Assembly: ex-minister and present senator Severo Gomes, author of the recent legal project (n° 379/85) for the creation of the Yanomami Park: the Chief of Cabinet of the Ministry of Justice, Flávio de Almeida Salles, representing Minister Paulo Brossard: the representative of the Teotônio Vilela Human Rights commission of Sao Paulo, the plastic artist Glauco Pinto de Moraes: Ailton Krenak, National Coordinator of the Union of Indian Nations (UNI) with headquarters in São Paulo; the representative of the Regional Coordinating Committee of UNI in Rondônia, Anine,Suruí: the journalist Mônica
Maia, of the Brazilian News Agency (EBN); and members of the national and regional coordination of the CCPY. Representatives of FUNAI also responded to the invitation and came to the Assembly: the delegate of the 10th Regional Delegation of Boa Vista, Raimundo Nonato, and the head of the Surucucus Attraction Post, Francisco Bezerra, who is fluent in the Yanomami language.

The committee of special guests came to hear "on the spot", in the middle of the Amazon forest, directly from the Yanomami themselves, their claims for the immediate creation of the Yanomami Park and for a systematic response to the problems of health which have resulted from disorderly contact with the surrounding society.

THE CONVOCATION

The constant invasions of their lands by mineral prospectors have led the Yanomami themselves to feel the need for discussing their problems along all lines. Yanomami leaders thus requested the support of the Union of Indian Nations (UNI) in organizing meeting among chiefs of various points in Yanomami territory.

Since 1974, the Yanomami have experienced the effects of contact with the surrounding society. Highway BR-210, the Northern Perimeter Highway, at that time, cut through the southern part of Yanomami territory, for over 225 kilometers. In a little over 3 years, 13 villages, located between kilometers 40 and 105, were reduced to 8 small family groups, who turned to living a precarious existence along the road. The indigenous groups lived around kilometer 145 were reduced to half their population as a result of 2 measles epidemics as well as several influenza epidemics.

An even greater problem arose in 1975, when the geological project of RADAMBRASIL discovered the existence of gold and cassiterite in the Yanomami area. The Serra de Surucucus, where about 4,000 isolated Yanomami live, was invaded by hordes of prospectors searching for cassiterite. In 1980, thousands of men invaded the Uraricoera and Ericó rivers, entering secretly in Yanomami lands to prospect for gold.

In 1985, men armed with machine guns and Clothed military uniforms attempted an invasion in the region of the Serra de Surucucus, led by the owner of an air-taxi firm in Manaus, and the current President of the Prospectors' Association of Roraima, José Altino Machado, who today lobbies in Brasilia to become a candidate for federal deputy.

Currently, a clandestine prospecting site functions in the region of the Rio Novo (see URIHI no 3), with hundreds of men, and another in the region of the Ericó River, and still another at the Serra de Uratanin. All of these are in the Federal Territory of Roraima, within the Yanomami area.

It's even known that 25 economic groups (companies) have mineral requests pending on lands occupied by the Yanomami, covering an area of approximately two thirds of the Park.

Never have the Yanomami been so threatened as they are today.
THE YANOMAMI

The Yanomami Indians have since remote times inhabited an extensive area of tropical forest in the frontier region between Brazil and Venezuela. Dispersed in about 320 villages, the Yanomami total in the two countries, a population of approximately 20,000 Indians, thus constituting the largest indigenous group of the Americas still in large part isolated from the surrounding society.

In Brazil, the Yanomami inhabit the areas of the Federal Territory of Roraima and the State of Amazonas. Their total population is estimated at around 9,000 Indians, the majority of whom still live according to their traditional ways. A dense and humid tropical forest covers their territory; the rough terrain as well as many rapids have made access to this area extremely difficult.

THE YANOMAMI INDIAN PARK

In view of the grave threats to the survival of the Yanomami, studies were undertaken by the CCPY and FUNAI for the creation of the Yanomami Park. As a result, a continuous area of 9 million hectares was delimited as the Yanomami area, for the Park, in 1984. It was concluded that the area proposed for the Park, although extensive, would not prejudice the development of the region.

In fact, 33.5 percent of the region consist of mountains regions which the Forestry Code declare to be areas of permanent protection, that is, not susceptible to economic exploitation.

Included in that area are the National Park of Pico da Neblina and the Forestry Reserve of Parima.
Another 44.5 percent of the area, according to the RADAMBRASIL Project consist of lands unsuitable for agriculture and cattle-ranching.

RADAM itself suggested that National Parks and ecological stations be created in that region. The mining company DOCEGEO has also stated that the exploitation of the existing cassiterite at Surucucucus would not Compensate for the costs that would accrue to the indigenous population of that area and that economically, there would be no interest at the national level. Currently Brazil is one of the leading producers of tin (cassiterite) and exports approximately 80% of its production.

The world market is currently saturated and there is no interest in increasing the production of this mineral.
Even further: prospecting in indigenous areas is, by law; reserved to the Indians themselves who inhabit
These areas.

“We Macuxi. we respect their area (that of the Yanomami).
We Macuxi, who have many Macuxi prospectors.
we respect it. How is it that the whites
can’t respect it? We Macuxi, we also advise
them: look, don’t go into the Yanomami area
because the area, is theirs. We have our area. We have to
respect the area of others.”
(Gilberto Lima Macuxi)

THE ASSEMBLY

Adorned with feathers and with their bodies painted black, the Yanomami headmen
and their guests sat in a semi-circle on the plaza of the Demini Indian Post under a
blue sky and refreshed by the breeze coming from the Serra dos Ventos.

Davi Yanomarni, head of the FUNAI Indian Post located at the Serra dos Ventos and
host of the visitors, fluent in Portuguese, opens the Assembly. Speaking on behalf of
the representatives of all of the communities, he states with conviction that this
Assembly is a combined force of the Yanomami to find a peaceful solution to the
invasion of their lands. The bilingual discourse of Davi Kopenawa Yanomami raises
the spirits of the headmen who then begin to speak. One by one, they begin to relate
their experiences with the prospectors, assisted in translation by Ivanildo
Wawanawetheri Yanomami, a Yanomami head of the Flechal Vigilance Post, on the
Mucajai River, who serves as an interpreter during the Assembly.

THE DISCOURSE OF THE CHIEFS

Standing in the middle of the semi-circle formed by all of their kin and by the guests,
the chief Esmeraldo Tisiporatheri, from Surucucus, assisted from a distance by the
women, and admired by the curious eyes of the more than 30 children present,
begins to tell his story.

"I worked, made my garden, cleared the land with my hands in order to
plant. I used stone axes to do this. When the white man came with steel
tools, I thought it was good. But then I saw that there were bad white men.
And that they would kill off the things I had to eat, my animals, and they
would even order me to work for them. Then after awhile they were going
to say: here nothing is yours. If I die, I have children
and a family that will remain, and who will remain, and who will suffer. If I die, I don’t
want them in the
hands of the white man. My father, grandfather, grandmother, my kin were
born here. Now, the whites want to control here. Its because of that that for
the first time the Yanomami are having conversations here. To begin to
understand."

Feeling the impact of the heated discourse of Esmeraldo, Carrera, headman of the
Wakathautherí,
On the Catirimani River, gets up and adds:
"We have to all walk together in the same
line, so as not to weaken our force. We only want Indians here. We are being respectful of them. But if they spill our blood, we will spill theirs also. We think this way. It's not on paper, but it is in the thoughts of each one of us."

The headman Raimundo, from the Serra of the Opiktheri, affirms: "We should not discuss any other problems; otherwise, nothing will be resolved. The Senator is here to see how the Indians eat, sleep, their ways, and their struggle so that later he can sit in his office and tell the President; otherwise he won't believe it. We want to live without confusion, without fighting. We don't want to spill blood, because no one is fighting with the whites. But the Indian is not afraid of the white man. And the young men respect the headmen when they give orders."

"I don't want the prospectors, I don't want the whites here. There is the white man who gives tools to us. If I start asking things from the white man, it will turn into a city here. They are going to take away my land. They will contaminate. He will kill off all my fish, my game, he will kill off all my freshwater shrimp, that I eat. He will finish off all the snakes and monkey that I eat. He will finish off everything, with the piece of land that I am going to plant. I am going to plant a stand of banana, and he will contaminate it. He will want an area of land for his cattle-raising. He will want an area for the prospectors. He will order me to work for him. He will increase in number in my area. He will want to give orders. He will increase a lot. Soon the white man will say: he is a great people. He is a rich man. It was the Yanomami who helped him. He made a ranch that the Yanomami do not have. If you planted a stand of banana, he will say that it is not yours. He will say it's mine. No, no, it's not yours. Who is paying is me. He will say, who is paying is me. You don't have rights, you aren't paying."

(Esmeraldo Tisiporatheri, of Surucucus)
The skin of the headmen Raimundo, Hamo Opiktheri, then wishes to tell how it was when the first prospectors came near, their village and he confronted them.

- "Who is your chief? Who sent you here?" Hamo Opiktheri asked.
- It was FUNAI, responded the prospector.
- You’re lying. You never went to FUNAI. You came secretly. Go away!"
- No I’m not going away. I’m going to hunt.
- No, you are not going to hunt. You are going to look for gold. I know that you are lying. Go away!"
- "All of this here is Brazil. It belongs to the Indian and the white man."
- "No. It’s not the white man’s land here. The white man has land for him to work. Brazil is large. Where the whites were born, they have a large area to work in, to sustain their families. Here, who works with minerals is who lives here. It’s the Yanomami who will do that. Because, if there is cassiterite, if there is gold here, the Yanomami will understand. A short while from now, he will begin to work, to take out the gold and sell it to earn money. He’ll get the things that he needs. Here, if you begin to enter, you’ll spread out everywhere: ah!! in the Yanomami area, there is a lot of gold, a lot of cassiterite. And everyone will come here and will finish off with everything, with game,

"They say: the Yanomami doesn’t do anything. The Yanomami is only lazy. What do the Yanomami want with a piece of land so large? A while from now, when I die. I have children that will remain. They will suffer. We have children, mothers, friends. When I die, I don’t want to leave them in the hands of the white man. My father, my grandfather and grandmother were born here. Because when there were no white men, I was already living here. There were already Indians here. Yanomami were here. Yanomami already were living here. The whites began to come. Brazil is big. There are whites that say there are no Indians in the region of SURUCUCUS. They have never been in the woods where there are Indians. We will invite them. And only in a forest like this here will you understand where there are Indians. In the middle of the forest is where you will find Yanomami xabono (houses). You will believe that there are Indians." (Esmeraldo Tisiporatheri, from Surucucus)

"We are against the prospectors because they are like ants, they spread out like ants. When we kill ants, they come back. They are like that." (Davi Kopenawa Yanomami)

fish, with pigs, with everything that we use to sustain ourselves. You will contaminate, you will bring a lot of sicknesses, a lot of malaria, sicknesses we have never seen, that we never have suffered. Because, without the white man,
we never suffered from the sicknesses that the people are suffering today."

Mario wakohipitheri, from the Paçu River, moved by speeches of the other Yanomami, gets up and speaks out, brandishing his weapons:

“ We treat the whites who are here well, because these whites like us. But the others, we kill, we cut up and put on the spit, to show whether the Yanomami Indian do not eat White. Because white man's flesh is very delicious. You'll see. We have already warned them a lot. Now we are becoming fed up, and our tempers are short. And we are Indians like the others. If the others eat, we will show that we, too, eat. If they burn my hammock, I will kill. Brazil is big, there is a lot of gold, and cassiterite. Those who will be born will grow up and continue the struggle. The Indians will get ahead, the whites will give support in Brasilia. We cannot give in, otherwise we will lose everything. We are not here together for that."

And the speeches continue. The complaints are the same:
"When the prospectors entered our land, some were good, some were bad. Then they began to give firearms. Then the fights began and with them, deaths. Sicknesses appeared that the Yallonami never saw. An Indian was knifed and two prospectors were shot with their shotguns. Then they went away. Then things calmed down. If they appear again, we will order them out. This is not their land here. It's the land of the Yanomami. If there is gold and cassiterite here, leave what's mine. When I want it, then I will take what is mine."

"I began to understand when I saw that the white man has a side that is good and a side that is bad. For it not to happen here in the area of the Yanomami, we are going to ask for demarcation. Because that is important for us, because may grandfather was born here. When he spoke, he said, my child, here we were born and here we are going to die. This is our land, you cannot give it away to anyone. It's yours, it's ours. When you have a family, your family will live here. When there were no whites, there were only Yanomami that lived here. It was the Indian who lived here first, so they have the right, the right
to say: here it is mine. The white man is going to want to say that here is not the Indian's -here. it "is the white's, that the Indian does not have the right. That the Indian is lazy, that the Indian doesn't do anything, that the Indian only lives' sleeping. The Indian only lives wandering, asking for things to sustain himself. Only lives asking for him to do something. Only lives wandering. And the white man says that the whites have the right - it's because it's untrue. The white man never Came to the maloca here. He says a lot about the life of the Indian. But he doesn't know. he neve' went inside a maloca to see what the Indian eats, to sustain his maloca, where he has a piece of garden for him to plant banana trees. a piece of yam to sustain hirn. The Indian is that. The Indian has the right to say that he is right. because he has something to live for. he has the right to say that he is Indian because he was born here. Before the white man appeared, there were Indians here in the forest. They never suffered from sicknesses, those kinds of sicknesses: measles catapora. He never suffered from those kinds of sicknesses. Today, he is aware. he is suffering. He is beginning to understand that it is for him to Struggle.”
( Ivanildo Wawanawetheri)

In the evening, Ado Taremutheri, a Yanomami from the Surucucus region, asked to show the scar of his wound, refused. Today he remains at distance, in his,hammock, fearful that his kin will ask him to show the stigma in public. Another Yanomami speaks:

“Tere is gold anywhere. Only here there are Yanomami Indians. But it is not only where
there are Indians that there is gold. There is gold anywhere, only look for it and it will be found. The prospectors want to become rich. Now, their workers don't become rich. Only their chiefs become rich." (Ivanildo Wawanawetheri, from the Maia River region).

And another:
"We only want demarcation. We are only asking for the demarcation of our indigenous area. Today, you whites are here, you are listening. You have the documents. You will take them to the President of the Republic to decide and say that we want our indigenous area. That's all that we want. The demarcation of our indigenous area is very important. We want this large bit here, demarcated. The whites say that it is very large. But they have to demarcate it. They have to get out of our indigenous area to end the fighting and confusion. So, if they demarcate, we will be quiet without fighting. Now, if FUNAI demarcates our area, and he continues to come in, cutting down the fence, then we will kill. Then you will hear in Brasilia: the Yanomami Indians killed prospectors and ate them."

And the interpreter Davi Yanomami, referring to the speaker, says:
"He had no idea. It's the first time that he is listening to that."

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**IT'S THE MACUXI'S TURN, INDIANS IN CONTACT WITH CIVILIZATION FOR 200 YEARS**

Moved by the speeches, the three Macuxi representatives - Gilberto Lima Macuxi, João Batista from Tacutu and Maú, and Silvério Messias, from the maloca of Barro, on the Surumu, want to tell their sad history to the Yanomami. They fear for the destiny of their brother people and want to prevent it from happening. In the morning they had left together to hunt in the forests that surround Watoriktheri, returning after a few hours with 15 queixadas (wild pig) for the great roast. Happy. Remembering past times.
Now they tell how they no longer have their lands to hunt. A long time ago they lost them. And also their mother tongue. And their traditions. They wan't to say how it was. So that these people may know how things happen for indigenous people.

And they speak. Of how the first white men who came were friends. Of how they decided to put fences on their lands, advising them however that everyone could continue hunting like before. And of how time passed and the children and grandchildren of the first who came began to say that they were owners of everything and to prevent the Macuxi from entering "their" lands. And of how, without their perceiving it, it was too late. There only remained the will to struggle to preserve the little that was left. Many questions are asked. The Yanomami chiefs want to know more, everything. They are understanding what can happen to them. So, everything could come to an end? This land that they love so much could become no longer theirs? It will disappear in the holes left by the prospectors? And also their birds, their rivers, their trees? And their children?!

"For a month I have been going around, looking at our Macuxi people, wanting to defend, looking for FUNAI looking for other autorities who can help us from Brasilia. We spent 24 days in Boa Vista to get our brothers who were taken prisoners in their own gardens, That is unjust. They were taken prisoners like criminals, The Secretary of Security you gentlemen should know who he is -Coronel Menna Barreto- he could send the police to get the person who is setting fire to our houses. But instead, he gets the person who suffered the damage and puts him in prison, like a criminal. And who was responsible for the fires is there. He makes believe that nothing happened, that he did what was right, that it wasn't a crime. So that's what it's about, for you gentlemen who have come from Brasilia, that we want to how we suffer." (Joao Batista Macuxi)

"Today our children can' even go there and say: I want a piece of meat. The patron, the chief, the , white man says: 'go work, turn around'! But before he was different with our Ancestors- his heart was good, eh? But you see. Anybody can come and say: 'I am good'. But inside, inside is what counts. I say this now, but later I will massacre'." (João Batista Macuxi)

A SENATOR OF THE REPUBLIC SPEAKS

Everyone wants to hear the words of that important white man who made a law there in the village of the whites to have the land of the Yanomami guaranteed.

And Now, Mr. Senator? Severo Gomes, the Senator who came from so far away to honor the Yanomami Assembly, carrying the spider-monkey fur hat with a big rim with which he was presented, directs himself to the most original tribune in which he has participated na
speaks to this audience so especial, attentive and anxious. Francisco Bezerra, the 
backwoodsman of FUNAI who has already shown his popularity in guiding words of
confidence and trust, in the Yanomami language, to the indians whith whom he has
lived for more than 20 years, is the interpreter for Severo Gomes's speech.

Of expressing his gratitude for the hospitality and generosity with which he was
received by the Yanomami, the Senator draws large smiles of approval from the
Yanomami, who shift the rolls of tobacco leaves that they costumarily have between
theirs gum and lower lips. They spit with modesty on the ground and all exchange
glances with satisfaction.

Convincingly, the Senator speaks loudly and with a pleasing sound, having as a
backdrop the Amazon forest, with its flocks of blue macaws and parrots, making his
voice echo to the Serra dos Ventos:

"The oldest laws of Brazil, and the laws of today as well, say that the
Indians’ lands are the Indians’ and the whites cannot enter them, nor become
owners of these lands. Nevertheless, these laws are being disobeyed. The
justices judge according to the interests of the ranchers or the prospectors
and not according to the law. And the Police, which were made to combat
crime, themselves end up committing crimes, in the defense of these illegal
interests. When, with the help of Claudia (Claudia Andujar, coordinator of
the CCPY), I presented the project for the creation of the Yanomami Park, I
was very pessimistic. Because the Indians were not aware of how to defend
their lands and were being cheated by the ranchers, by the prospectors, and
little by little there would occur the same thing that has occurred so many
times in Histoty -one after the other, so many tribes were decimated.

Today I have greater hope, because I have seen the headmen in this
Assembly here and they, are firmly resolved to react to the invasion of their
lands. Even if the project for the creation of the Park wasn't passed, this Park
would come into being at the moment when all Indians became aware that it
is they who will create and defend the Park. You defend your lands, with,
your arrows, with your weapons, with your courage, because you have the
right to defend them in whatever way possible. And you will find in Brasilia,
in the National Congress, in the Ministry of Justice and in the Presidency of
the Republic voices that will increasingly help to make this process peaceful,
tame, so that your rights may be recognized. I wish to thank, in my name and
that of my colleagues, you for the hospitality with which the Yanomami
received us. And I hope to return here when there is another horizon, of
tranquility, of peace, with the rights of the Indians respected, a basic thing of
the decency of a government, which has to act so that the law and the rights
of all Brazilians are respected and among them the Yanomami, Macuxi, and
all other Indians. Thank you very much."

FRATERNIZING IN THE XABONO, COMMUNAL DWELLING OF THE YANOMAMI

The speech of Senator Severo Gomes closes the Yanomami Assembly. The
headmen, so full of wisdom, now know even more. The atmosphere is one of
euphoria. The headman Lourival, from the village of Watoriktheri, invites everyone
to spend the night in his "xabono" (Yanomami communal house), which is six
kilometers from the Demini Post. Everyone happily agrees.
Preparations begin for the trip. The Yanomami women carry their baskets on their backs and, the smaller children; at their their breast. The men carry theirs arrows and the left -overs of the hunt.

With our hammocks in khapsacks, we begin, the walk. Up front is the headman Esmeraldo, carrying an enormous roasted queixada liver. It’s better to guarantee...

Then comes Geraldo; a Yanomami youth who after 15 minutes of walking points to signs of a jaguar's having passed through... Now the visitor ask the questions. It’s the Yanomami’s turn to answer. The interpreters come in handy... The guests, despite being tired, are excited by the new experience. To walk through the Amazon forest in the company of more than 100 Yanomami Indians, men, women, and children...

For the Yanomami, the expedition to the xabono is a daily affair. For the others, it’s the living testimony of a culture so distinct from the "white" world, the Macuxi or Suruí. Of a culture that is part of the patrimony of humanity.

And the xabono, which does not appear? It’s already beginning to get dark!

Suddenly the Yanomami headman leaves the trail and follows a path to the right.

A few metere ahead is the xabono. Grandiose. Imposing.
Built with a covering of ubim leaves on a structure of paxiúba logs, the circular xabono has a diameter of about 50 meters. The passage ways to the inside are low and narrow, barely visible.

We enter reverently. Another spectacle awaits us. The central ceiling of the xabono, far overhead, totally open to the sky, lets us see a piece of the sky which, thus framed, seems to be even more brilliant.

The stars begin to shine and the full moon already promises the brilliance which it later will present to us. Assisted by our hosts, we begin to hang our hammocks on the trunks of the wood that support the Xabono.

Little by little, the Yanomami families arrange themselves in their customary places in the xabono, and various cooking fires begin to light up here and there. The smoke of the ubim leaves begins to arise near the already dark walls of the xabono. Night comes quickly. Gourds with banana mingau (soup) begin to go around. Enormous roasted bananas are offered to the guests. And accepted with pleasure. There is a climate of festival in the Air. The women, with their bodies painted with urucum and black, sinuous designe, begin to group together. They get ready to honor us with their songs and dances.

Rested and well-fed, we settle in our hammocks, beneath the star-filled sky, looking attentively to the great circle of beaten-down earth, where the dance will begin.

The pretty Yanomami girls, some carrying children in their arms, smile and begin to sing. Backwards and forwards, they dance in timed steps. They stop and begin again. Many times.

The hours pass. The songs and the dance continue well into the night. Illuminated now only by the light of the moon, the xabono is surrounded by the magic of the sounds and rhythm of the Yanomami songs. We don't even know anymore if we are dreaming or not...

RETURN TO BOA VISTA

On the following day, the commision disembarked in Boa Vista. The city already knows of the Senator presence. Journalists await him for a collective interview. They want to know why the Senator is so interested exactly in the creation of the Yanomami Park and not in other indigenous questions of the Federal Territory of Roraima.

Severo Gomes responds:

"I am concerned with all indigenous questions. It's just that, today, I am focusing on a concrete project, where there exists something very important to be preserved, which is the culture of these Yanomami, who have not been deculturated. The knowledge of what happens with them, of their social structure, their history, has a great deal of importance for us. The question of the Yanomami is not a question of the Yanomami, it is a question of the Brazilians! In my conversation with the Governor of the Territory, he did not offer any argument against the creation of the Yanomami Park. On contrary. He put himself in a very strong position of blocking the advance of the prospectors in the indigineous area. I believe
that his greatest concerns are not in the Yanomami area but in the Macuxi area and other tribes, where there are old, unresolved conflicts with ranchers and old or recent occupations, and with the Macuxi Indians. That was the concern expressed to me with relation to the creation of the Yanomami Park, and my project, he didn't use any argument against it. And, on the contrary, he is disposed to use police force to impede the invasion of the prospectors in the Yanomami area. And the great problem of the Yanomami is the prospecting." Journalist: "Did you find any prospector" there?"

Severo GOMES: "There were no prospectors there. I think Indians have already frightened the prospectors away."

J: "Senator, and the participation of the Church there, how did you see it?"

SG: "Look, I didn't see the participation of the Church. There was the participation of FUNAI. It's a curious thing, because you always find people here who seek to give an interpretation, always thinking that FUNAI doesn't know anything, that the Church is wanting to incite the Indians and that is they who understand these questions, not only with respect to the Territory but also with respect to our position as a civilized nation. The State has an agency that takes care of the Indian and has competent technicians to undertake this work. I think that all of this is a fantasy to awaken a nationalist spirit that all of us have. It's just that it won't succeed because it is a meaningless fantasy – do you imagine that a reduced group of Indians who live in a very primitive situation could tomorrow invent a thing like this – Yanomami nation. Also I think that in our borders. The army ought to have a greater presence. Put battalions or troops there, even to demystify this idea of the creation of an independent nation."

J: "The Senator found that these exist in the area contingent of approximately how many Indians? Does the Senator believes that so many Indians will form part of the Yanomami nation?"

SG: "We went to the Demini FUNAI Posto afterwards. We walked for, perhaps 8 kilometers and we went to another location. The number of Indians that we met was very small. Now, the information that I had, before coming here was very contradictory. There were people who said that in Brazil there were 15,000 Yanomami. What FUNAI today says is that there are 9,000. Now, it's they who are studying the problem and they are there! You could say! What is the interest of FUNAI in increasing or, in decreasing the number of Indians? Right?"

J: "And why aren't indigenous land in this country, being demarcated?"

SG: "It can be said that past here were even many demarcations. Today you go there - it was demarcated, it was indigenous land - and there is nothing left. I think that that happens through the lack of social and
political consciousness of the Indians. For that reason, I give a lot of importance to the discussions I had in this meeting with the Yanomami headmen. It became very clear that it is they who have to take the lead with Congress, FUNAI and the Church behind them. It is they who ought to be conscious of their nation, of the need to defend themselves. Then, you can make laws and allow the maintenance of their reserves to occur in a peaceful way, in the course of time."

J: "Senator, what would be the solution for the indigenous problem in the Territory, since it involves interests of the dominant class which does not want to change its position on the development of the Territory, instead of preserving the Indians?"

SG: "I believe that there is a great deal of deception when one speaks of the development of the Territory. Because bands of prospectors are set loose and a short while from now, there won't be anything left. Nothing has been developed. You only have holes, Te waters will be destroyed, since the use of mercury to concentrate the gold kills off the river life. So is a question of the ecology, of the true question of development. How does one develop a society, what does that society think about its future, of its permanence, of its family, of its relations with nature and its social relations such as

this? You need to have maturity for that. We aren’t discussing the problem of a Territory.

We are discussing the problem of Brazil, where the Territory has a great deal of importance. What cannot be allowed is that the political questions are resolved under a great deal of pressure, as if Roraima was a project of Guatemala. No, it isn't! Roraima is a project of Brazil. One can get this kind of distortion. A society in construction, a relatively recent construction. A certain, kind of pressure that ends up undermining the law. We have a constitution, we have laws that preserve certain things. So, at this moment one can even have police action. Instead of being the agent that restrains crime, he becomes the practitioner of crime, with a system of Justice that is very allowable, a system of Justice that is compromised and which makes absolutely illegal decisions. I want to have the opportunity of looking for the Magistrate of Justice in Brasilia so that he can order a correction of justice here in the Territory. Because all of the interests have to be discussed within the law and not by hiring out force to defend oneself."

J: "Senator, you say that you are a person very attached to indigenous problems. How do you see the situation that one finds in the Territory today: the Brazilian prospector not being able to work, the Indian being exploited, being put in a mine to work and putting all of the gold in the hands of Italian, priests, and one doesn't even know what happens to the gold, if it stays in Brazil or disappears..."
SG: "That is something that I have heard a lot about here. So, let's call on the Federal Police to find out where the gold is, and let's not be making up a story that they are going to create a nation, that the Italian priests are taking the gold out of the country. Laws, and Justice exist for that. And let's not be making up a kind of discourse in order to attack the Church, saying that it doesn't understand anything, or to attack FUNAI. Only one thing is left: It's the invasion of the lands of the Indians, it is to make the mine predatory, it is to destroy nature, to destroy the waters of the rivers and later, to have only the destroyed land left, and a few people who can be satisfied only with themselves. But that is a problem for society, for a Territory, for people who participate, who work and who want to know the truth, and not just simply listen to a discourse. I am even going to look for be Minister of Justice to say: look here, you have to take steps. Send the Federal Police to find out where it is and what's happening."

J: "The Indians themselves, the headmen themselves of several malocas have sought out our Secretary of Security here to make this kind of denunciation. That there has been within their area a gold mine that has been exploited for over three years and that this mine produced between 50 and 80 grams of gold weekly and that all of this gold was being put into the hands of these people and that until now they haven't seen anything more of it..

SG: "The Indiana look for the Secretary! A State that puts an agency that works with Indiana in the secretary of Security... In the first place, for me any kind of document that comes out of a Secretary of Security that has the kind of police that take Indians prisoner, already is suspect. If people who are taken prisoner in São Paulo. Who have independence go to the Police and sign everything that they want, how much more here. I'll give you an example: yesterday, I arrived from the indigenous assembly. I met here in the doorway, a citizen (Pacifal Lustosa) who said to me: "I hope that you have not come here to undermine the work of the Colonel Mena Barreto" I had to show him my agitation, and tell him that I don't suffer from this kind of pressure from a police official here in Roraima. The Police, for me, cannot be trusted. It seems like it couldn't happen here in Brazil: a police official coming to a senator with threats. My God!"

J: "the Senator felt the tension?"

SG: "Exactly! This kind of pressure, this business of police getting involved in the affairs of the Indian, to explo Indians, to take Indians prisoner, like in the Macuxí case (at the time 4 Macuxí chiefs had been in prison for over a month due to land conflicts), leaving them in jail there. When a prospector is taken to prison. He's freed on the next day. 

J: "The Senator believes that he can count on the support of the Senate in the approva
of the project for the creation of the Yanomami Park?"
SG: "I count on the support of the Senate and I will
count on the support of the Executive Power, because
I am going to go directly to the President of the
Republic to discuss this question with him. And it
wasn't without reason that, coming here and already knowing how the
Secretary of Security functions here,
I asked the Minister of Justice to send someone to
accompany me and he sent his Chief of Cabinet, to
gather information and take it to him."
J: "So, the Senator is going to take what he has
found out here to the President of the Republic?"
SG: "Exactly."
J: "The project will be considered by the end of
this semester, isn't that right Senator?"
SG: "I hope so. It has to pass through the commissions. We are still
in the beginning stages.
I hope that it will soon have the approval of the
Senate and later go back to the Chambers."
J: "The Senator has already made contact with a
deputy of the Territory, to know, to discuss the
Project?"
SG: "No, I have not."
J: "Will the Senator hear what the Roraima deputies
have to say about the question?"
SG: "I think it's a good suggestion. I will look for
them in Brasilia and I will talk with them."
J: "How did the Senator formulate this project?
SG: "Based on FUNAI itself, on the first proposal of
FUNAI for the creation of the Park."
J: "In fact, the Senator had no local or regional consultants?"
SG: "No, I had no local consultants, given that
FUNAI happens to be considered the agency that knows
the indigenous problem. I think one can say in the
positive sense also. Also I had contacts with the
CCPY -Commission for the Creation of the Yanomami Park."
J: "FUNAI here doesn't seem to enjoy much credibility. It seems that it's highly
criticized."
SG: "I think that if you create a climate against the
Indian, FUNAI is always going to be criticized."
J: "Senator, what's your understanding of the
indigenous problem in terms of responsibility? Let's
say that today the Indian is irresponsible as a
citizen. Me also cannot be accused. But, we here in
the Territory have some indigenous features. For
the Senator to have an idea, we had here an Indian
with a card and everything, who was nothing less than
a representative of a multinational in the Territory.
And he was Indian."
SG: "Then he must not have been a representative of
a multinational. He must be a tool of the
multinational who tied up some money in his pocket.
There are worlds of Indians around to be deceived.
Isn't it true?"
J: "Yes, so I would ask the Senator, how would you
explain that?"
SG: "I think there are a lot of people who take
advantage of the Indian, who exploit them. I think
even that there are many prospectors who put the
Indian in front and say, "Look, you go in front to
prospect", so, everyone sees that he is Indian.
And, basically, who is prospecting is the prospector, right?
The good faith of the Indian has always been
exploited. It's not only here and now. It's
national problem."
J:"I would like to know about the difference of na
acculturated Indian...
SG: It's that here in the Territory, the Indian puts on glasses - he's already
aculturated! The Indian
wears blue jeans – He is no longer Indians. It's as they say:
"an Indian to be an Indian has to be
naked and painted, in tile woods." It's absurd!
Go see other indigenous populations, who are
participants, as in Rio Grande do Sul, Paraná, Minas Gerais, Amazonas."
J: "Here, for the people of Roraima, the Indian who more or less
speaks Portuguese, who is clothed and
soon, is the caboclo. Now I ask you, what is the
person from Roraima?"
SG: "It's that here one gives a pejorative meaning
to caboclo. Caboclo, in the national language has
always been used to identify people- that is a good Caboclo and
so on. In the language used throughout Brazil.
Here, it's that caboclo refer to that Indian who
was on the border of civilization
when the rancher came and said: "let me put my
cattle to pasture here", who earns a little, receives
some shorts and ends up liking to ride on bicycles,
to see the city, to use his dark glasses. It's a
portion that degenerates, who continues to be Indian
and continues being a victim, worse even than those
who have little contact."
J: "But the Senator believes in a more energetic action on the part

of the federal government.
concerning the indigenos problem in the territory?"
SG:"In the compliance with the law. Compliance with
The law that exists."
J:"That eternal polemic...
SG: “That eternal polemic if we had to make laws; we have to pass through a
polemic.
You have a law that has to be complied, so you have to demand it.
Principally at this time, when people become aware
of the importance of participation, of militancy, you have to demand
that the government comply with the law. And I think that is
beginning to happen.”
J: “Senator, tell me something: after the creation of the Park, will the Church
continue to have access to indigenous areas?"
SG: "In all Parks that have been created, the Church
was removed. That is to say, FUNAI came to give
greater assistance, as in the case of the Xingu,
right? Today, you can say that FUNAI has so few
resources, to take the Church out of a certain place
would mean abandoning it. I think that the
government ought to have resources for FUNAI to do
the work correctly, without needing to ask for help
from anyone.".
J:"The Senator believes that the imprisonment of the
Indian won't happen again here in the Territory?
SG: "No, I don't believe that it won't happen again.
As long as you have the disposition to have a police
force that works for certain interests, these Indians
will be taken prisoners. For the time being."
J:"Senator Severo Gomes, why was it that only after
your project was ready that you came to the Territory?"
SG: "Because I had no need for any more factual
elements for the problem of the Yanomami Park. This is a question that
we have been discussing for a long
time, with FUNAI, with anthropologists. That is, there
exists a national awareness on this question.
The fact of walking over more or less than 10 kilometres,
within the Park or among Yanomami malocas, won't going to add anything more
to what I already had at my disposal to present the project."
J:"The Senator had some supporting data from persons
who knew the Indians problem here in the Territory?"
SG: "First, FUNAI itself. And also the Commission for the Creation of
the Creation of the Yanomami park."
J:Senator, your project should be voted on even in this
legislative assembly. The Senator believes that
it will be approved?"
SG: "I believe that it can be approved."
J: "A lot of news has circulated about the participation
of international organizations and missionaries in the
indigenous areas of Brazil. The Senator doesn't believe
that the creation of the Park would bring more people
within these areas?"
SG: "No, much to the contrary. I think that all of the
that comes from the enemies of the creation of the Park.
Because of that, I asked the Minister of Justice to
get information and so that tomorrow the Government,
through the agencies that exist, the Federal Police, can verify
whether it's really true or whether it's an invention of the enemies of the
Park and of the indigenous people."
J: "The Senator support the idea that one should create
a nation within another nation?
SG: "Look, this is another kind of invention which comes
from those who seek the destruction of the Indians, who
detest them, who think they are an obstacle to progress,
to development."
J: "The Senator doesn't believe that this idea of the
creation of the Yanomami Park is part of a strategy
for the denationalization of Amazonia"
SG: "Look, no one can claim to be more nationalist,
in Brazil than I. Now, that is a delusion which is
intended to awaken a certain kind of nationalism
more ignorant than the delusion. Where have you
ever seen a thing like this imagined before? What we
want is our frontier batallions on the frontier, you understand? It's an unthinkable thing! It even seems childish that people go on repeating it!"
J: "And why create a Yanomami nation in a frontier area?"
SG: "Because they live there, purely and simply!
You would rather take this Yanomami nation to the Tietê River?
No! It's the place where they've lived for more than 3,000 years! Only through an absolute ignorance of what 3,000 years of life of a culture means, in a place where they can survive. without destroying nature, without anything, can you ask such a question why there and not Rio Grande do Sul."
J: "But the creation of an indigenous reserve would prevent the entrance of any other people. Wouldn't that prevent the entrance of the army and thus facilitate foreign penetration in the country?"
SG: "The Army will not be forbidden anywhere, as it never was. The prohibition of entry into the indigenous area is for people who may be elements that introduce disease, corrupt their culture, destroy their social organization. The Brazilian Army has no legal impediment to enter in any place, and it would be absurd if they were prevented from doing so.
We have even advocated that they have a fixed position within the Park and in neighboring regions of the frontier."
J: "Senator, the CCPY itself is formed by a group of foreign elements!"
SG: "I think that you can have naturalized foreigners, Brazilians. The simple fact that you imagine that we have foreigners in the Comission for the Creation of the Yanomami Park doesn't discredit it. Here we are, Brazilians, thinking that. This is part of another one of those chapters that want the destruction of the Indian and want to deceive the stupid nationalists, let's say."
J: "Senator, you have a notable passion for indigenous causes. Why, for example, have you never attempted the creation of a Indigenous Park in São Paulo?"
SG: "In the state of São Paulo there is a small group of Guaranis. The Indians of São Paulo were destroyed by the same process as is happening here. Of destruction.
It would be to accept that we today, a country that calls itself civilized, can accept the practices that occurred three centuries ago, of massacres, of genocide."
J: "The Senator has these data on Brazil?"
SG: "Oh Brazil? But Brazilian History is full of that! If you had been careful to learn the history of Brazil, to read what happened with the Brazilian Indians, you wouldn't be asking this question."
J: "Senator, do you know the history of the Indian of Roraima?"
SG: "I know a little of the history of the Wapixana, of the Macuxi, and I think that it doesn't differ much from what happened in the rest of Brazil. Hence this indignation, this willingness that a new condition be created, that FUNAI have prestige, that it have the strength to guarantee this preservation."
J: "Thank you, Senator."
SG:"It is I who am thankful,"

"We are aware. We are united. We are the only
Yanomami Indian area, we want to live on our land."
(Davi Kopenawa Yanomami)

LEGAL PROJECT 379/85 FOR THE CREATION OF THE YANOMAMI PARK, WRITTEN BY SENATOR
SEVERO GOMES, WAS PRESENTED TO THE NATIONAL CONGRESS IN
DECEMBER/85. ONLY WITH THE STRONG AND BROAD-BASED SUPPORT
OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY WILL THIS POSSIBILITY
BECOME A REALITY. WE ASK, THEREFORE, THAT MESSAGES IN
SUPPORT OF THE CREATION OF THE YANOMAMI PARK, IN
ACCORDANCE WITH LEGAL PROJECT 379/85, BE SENT TO BRAZILIAN
PRESIDENT -JOSE SARNEY PALACIO DO PLANO ALTO -70150 BRASÍLIA DF
- BRAZIL - WITH COPIES SENT TO THE CCPY.
WE ARE GRATEFUL FOR ALL DEMONSTRATIONS OF SUPPORT THAT
WE HAVE RECEIVED.

CREDITS

CONCEPTUALIZATION
OF THE
ASSEMBLY

UNI NATIONAL WITH
THE PARTICIPATIONS
OF YANOMAMI
COMMUNITIES

COMPILATION OF DATA
AND VISUAL
PROGRAMMING

CLAUDIA ANDUJAR

ELABORATION OF
TEXT

LUCIA PRADO

TRANSLATION
PHOTOS

ROBIN WRIGHT

5-YANOMAMI LEADERS WITH AILTON KRENAK;
7-CHIEF LOUIVAL, SEVERO GOMES, FLAVIO DE ALMEIDA SALLES,
GLAUCO PINTO DE MORAES;
10- XAMAND NOÉ KOPENAWA YANOMAMI; 19- IVANILDO
WAWANAWETHERI YAN OMAMI; 20/21- YANOMAMI;
20/21 – YANOMAMI, MACUXI, ANINE SURUI, AILTON KRENAK, SEVERO
GOMES, FLAVIO ARALLES, GLAUCO P. MORAES;
23- BRAAI (RITUAL FESTIVAL DURING THE ASSEMBLY IN THE
XABONO; 25- GILBERTO MACUXI