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Ecos del Yasuní

Time is running out to determine how the process of dismantling oil activities in the Yasuní will look

As of November 2024, Daniel Noboa's government, according to statements from Petroecuador, claims that 10 of a total of 247 oil wells in the ITT (acronym in Spanish for Ishpingo-Tambococha-Tiputini) have been closed, despite the Constitutional Court's mandate to close them within one year following the result of August 2023 Popular Consultation in which 59% of the Ecuadorian population decided to leave the crude oil in the ground and dismantle oil activities in the Yasuní ITT . The government argued that meeting the deadline would be impossible and requested an extension to five years. However, this timeframe is excessive considering the risks faced by the recently contacted Waorani indigenous populations and peoples in voluntary isolation in the area.

The above was ratified by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (CIDH, in its Spanish acronym) in March 2025 . In a historic ruling—the first case this institution has resolved regarding Indigenous peoples in voluntary isolation—the Court determined that the Ecuadorian State violated the rights to collective property, a dignified life, health, food, a healthy environment, and housing, among others, to the detriment of these Indigenous peoples. In addition, it declared its responsibility for the violation of the rights to personal integrity, honor, dignity, childhood, identity, protection of the family, residence, and judicial guarantees, to the detriment of two Taromenane girls who were separated from their community. The ruling also recognized these peoples

as "ecosystemic," meaning that their survival directly depends on the forest they inhabit.

Despite this, state-owned Petroecuador announced on May 5th, 2025, the signing of contracts with the Chinese oil services giant SINOPEC for a total of USD 105.55 million to begin an oil drilling campaign in the Amazonian provinces of Orellana and Sucumbíos, with the aim of increasing oil production by 12,000 barrels per day.

This contract affects the Apaika Nenke fields in Block 31 and Pañacocha in the province of Orellana. According to Petroecuador, this project is expected to increase production by 2,900 barrels per day.

This oil field is located within Block 31, which, although not included in Block 43 (where the dismantling of oil infrastructure is planned), partially overlaps with the Yasuní intangible area and has always been linked to Block 43 in its operation. This means that, due to its proximity, it could continue violating the rights to existence of the Tagaeri and Taromenane peoples in voluntary isolation. Block 31 is adjacent to Block 16, where Repsol has shut down oil operations due to well depletion. All three blocks, 43, 31, and 16, have historically affected the Yasuní and its peoples.

The lives of these peoples cannot be limited to an abstract space, as they travel across vast territories, even beyond the intangible realm. It has been proven that the episodes of violence, in which they have been involved, are directly related to what they perceive as a threat to their territory.

A clear example occurred in 2013, when two Waorani elders, Ompore and Buganey, were attacked with spears by uncontacted indigenous people. These indigenous people had repeatedly expressed their fear of outsiders invading their territory due to oil drilling and illegal logging. Nevertheless, no preventive

measures were taken, triggering an attack that, in turn, led to a retaliatory massacre by some Waorani, followed by the kidnapping of two Taromenane girls.

The external presence in their territory is not only through people, but also through factors such as machinery noise and overflights, which have produced violent conflicts.

If the Ecuadorian State wishes to be consistent with the popular mandate to cease oil exploitation in Block 43 and protect the peoples in voluntary isolation, it must consider the entire territory, including Block 31 and even Block 16. It is important to be aware that the time has come for closure, dismantling, and comprehensive reparation. The right to life of the Waorani and isolated indigenous peoples must prevail.

Furthermore, the noise generated by drilling in Block 31 will undoubtedly affect the lives of isolated communities, whose existence depends on a vast, undisturbed territory.

Interview

Eduardo Góes Neves

He holds a bachelor's degree in History from the University of São Paulo, a master's degree and doctorate in Anthropology from Indiana University, and is a professor at the University of São Paulo. He is a professor and director of the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at the University of São Paulo, where he teaches undergraduate and graduate courses. He is a researcher at the Center for Amerindian Studies (CESTA) at USP and coordinator of the Tropical Archaeology Laboratory at the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology. He is a professor in the Graduate Program in Sociocultural Diversity at the Emilio Goeldi Museum of Pará, Belém, in the Master's Program in Neotropical Archaeology at the Escuela Superior Politécnica del Litoral (ESPOL), Guayaquil, Ecuador, and in the Graduate Program in Archaeology at the University of the Center of the Province of Buenos Aires, Olavarría, Argentina. He has been a visiting professor at Harvard University (CAPES-Harvard Senior Visiting Professor), the National Museum of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, the National Museum of Natural History in Paris, and the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru in Lima. He has some 130 publications, including books, articles, book chapters, and popular texts. He is the coordinator of the CNPq research group "Historical Ecology of the Neotropics." Winner of the 2019 Shanghai Archaeological Forum Research Award.

South American states maintain a paradoxical relationship with their Amazonian territories: they claim sovereignty over these places, whose populations they abandon, while citing their wealth and presenting them as territories available for extractive development. In Ecuador, this tension manifested dramatically when official maps were altered to hide the presence of peoples in voluntary isolation in oil concession areas. **From your practice, which interweaves archaeology and history, how do you understand this controversial relationship, and why does it persist so strongly in contemporary politics?**

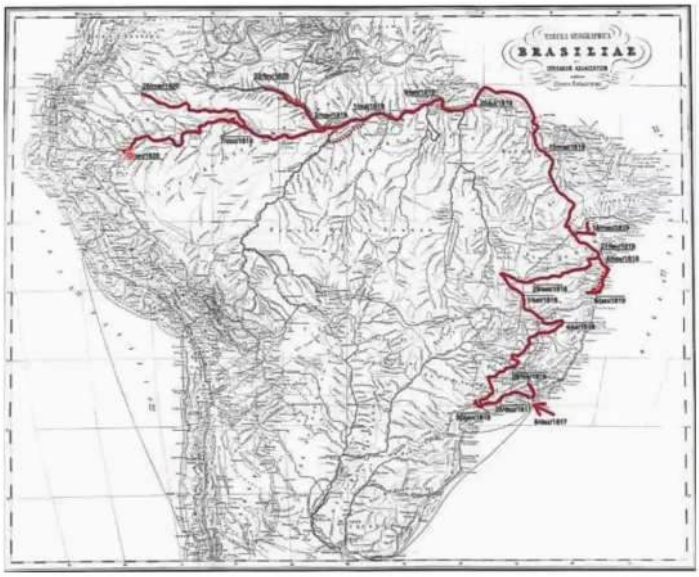
This paradox you describe has deep roots in the internal colonialism that characterizes our countries. States claim sovereignty but abandon these populations because, deep down, the colonial idea that the Amazonia is an empty territory persists. We have very strong internal colonial relations in our countries focused on their Amazonian territories. If you look at all the countries in South America that have Amazonian territories, their capitals are not in their Amazonia regions. Quito is high in the Andes, Lima is on the Pacific coast of Peru, and Bogotá is also in the mountains. Here in Brazil, Brasilia is not in the Amazonia either. In Bolivia, La Paz is also in the mountains.

This internal colonialist view generates so many social and environmental problems because it stems from the perception that the Amazonia is an empty territory, that few people have lived there over time, that it's empty spaces awaiting projects from outside to promote what is considered development. And we know that this perspective generates catastrophes.

This idea can be historically traced to the work of Carl Friedrich Philipp von Martius, a German

scientist who traveled through Brazil between 1817 and 1820. Von Martius made a three-year journey to near Iquitos, very close to the mouth of the Napo River. What caught his attention the most was the number of different Indigenous languages spoken in the Amazonia.

→ Viagem ao Brasil (1817-1820). Spix & Martius.

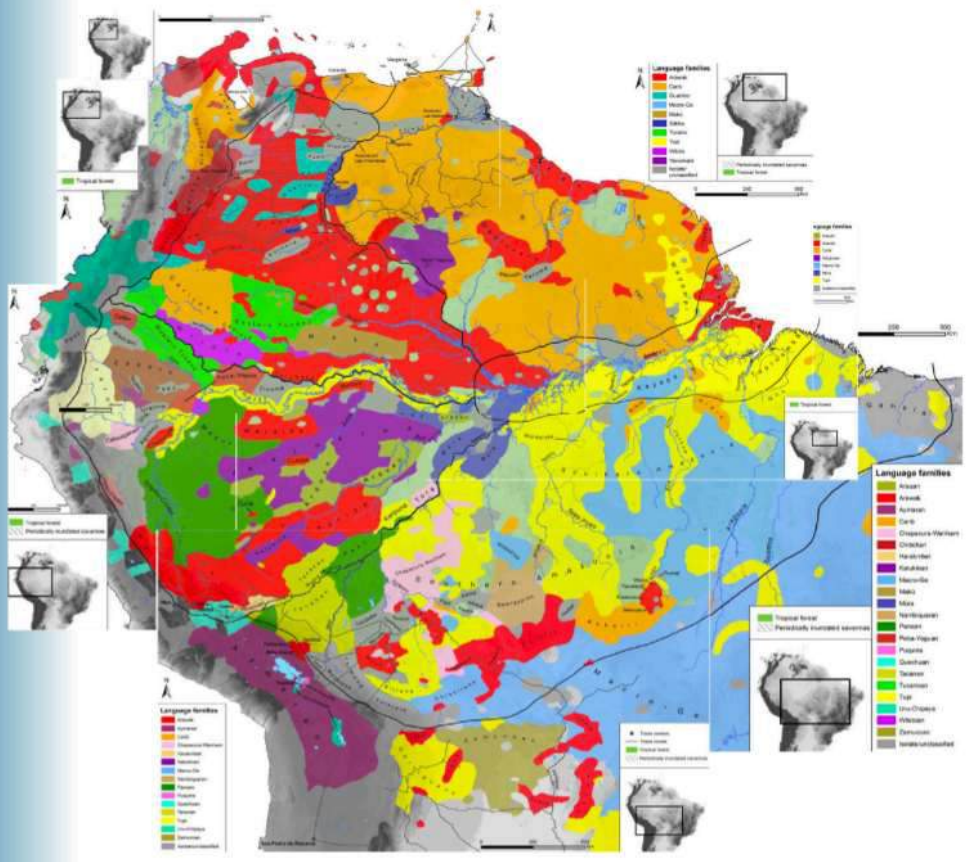


If you look at this map, each color represents a different group of Indigenous languages, a family of Indigenous languages. The Amazonia is one of the most linguistically diverse regions on the planet.

But Von Martius interpreted this diversity not as something positive resulting from a very ancient history of relationship with nature, but as something negative. He proposed a terrifying theory that still influences Amazonian public policies today: this diversity resulted from peoples who came from other areas of the continent and, upon reaching the Amazonia, were unable to keep the same level of civilization and "degenerated" into more savage forms. It's a very racist theory. Racist from an

environmental perspective, but also from the history of Indigenous peoples.

↓ Ethnolinguistic groups in the Amazon at the time of European contact (1542). This represents the situation prior to the post-contact demographic collapse. Compilation of maps by Eriksen, L. (2011). Nature and Culture in Prehistoric Amazonia: Using GIS to reconstruct ancient ethnogenetic processes from archaeology, linguistics, geography, and ethnohistory [Doctoral thesis, Human Ecology Division, Lund University].



But what archaeology has demonstrated in the last 30 years is that there have always been many people living in Amazonia, Indigenous peoples, the ancestors of contemporary Indigenous peoples; furthermore, that the Indigenous peoples—who have lived in the Amazonia—created it. The Amazonia we know today is a historical product generated by the

creative action, by the practices of the Indigenous peoples who have occupied it for thousands of years.

We are aware of several things that archaeology has shown in Amazonia. First, there is a very ancient Indigenous occupation that began 13,000 years ago. Second, the Amazonia has been an independent core of plant domestication and cultivation; an important nucleus for the generation of what we call «agrobiodiversity». There are many important plants, such as cacao, cassava, peanuts, sweet potatoes, chonta, and pineapple, that were initially cultivated in the Amazonia by Indigenous peoples thousands of years ago.

We also know that the earliest ceramics on the American continent were produced in the Amazonia. In Ecuador, for example, in the Palanda region (in southern Ecuador), there are very early ceramics dating back five thousand years, but here in Brazil, very ancient ceramics are also found in various sites.

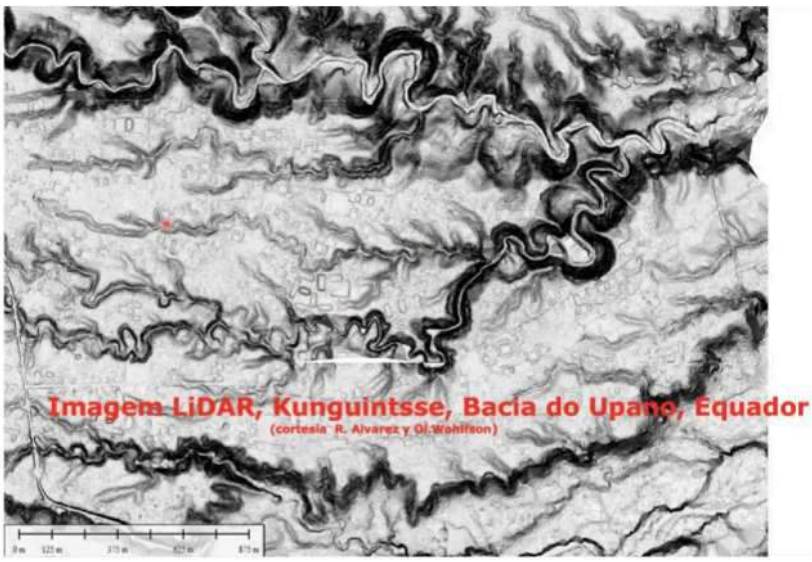
And the most interesting thing is the idea of producing abundance, because many of the discourses—that even today legitimize extractive practices—are very much based on the idea of scarcity, that something is missing in the Amazonia, that there isn't much protein, that the soils are very poor. Always a very strong idea of scarcity. But if you look at archaeology, what you see is the opposite: a very ancient and very long history of producing abundance.

I could have taken this photo in Ecuador, but I took it here in Brazil. If you look at these plants here—this is cacao, for example—even the earliest cacaos we know come from the Ecuadorian Amazonia. If you look at the cultivation practices in the Amazonia, the plants you can find there, you can see that they've been cultivated and managed for millennia. We can say they're «agroecological practices.»

← Native foods of the Amazon: cacao, babassu nut, cashew nut, cassava, Brazil nut, among others. Photograph by E. Góes Neves (2024).

We even have evidence of Amazonian urbanism. This work, published this year on Valle del Upano in Ecuador, shows how what today appears to be an area that has never been inhabited, actually has a very strong record of very ancient Indigenous presence, beginning approximately 2,700 years ago. All those earthen structures you see are like neighborhoods, small areas, forming an urban layout. It seems that people lived and had their homes in the middle of the forest, not separated from it like contemporary cities.

↓ LiDAR image of Kunguintsse, Bacia do Upano, Ecuador. Courtesy of R. Alvarez and OI. Wohlfson. Presented by E. Góes Neves in the course "Community expertise and other expertise in the protection of natural and cultural heritage," UASB, Quito, 2024.



● Extractive infrastructures like roads operate under the promise of "development" and "integration," but they systematically fragment territories and facilitate destructive activities. In the Yasuní region, oil routes have profoundly altered territorial patterns. **Your research reveals pre-Hispanic road networks that functioned in radically different ways. What does this historical difference teach us about the possibilities of imagining infrastructures that regenerate rather than extract?**

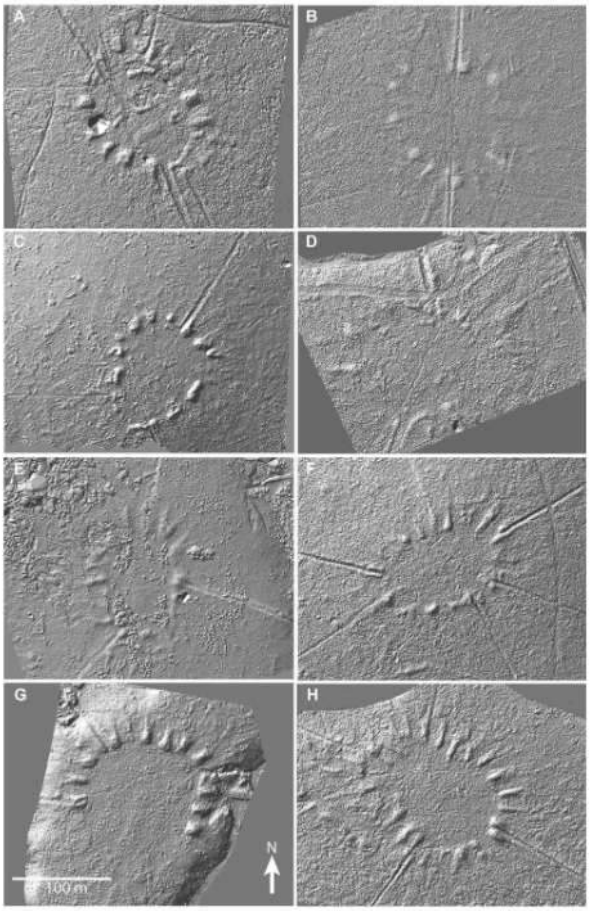
One very interesting thing we're finding—using LiDAR technology—is networks of ancient trails. This technology is impressive. It allows us to see structures beneath the forest. It's like an X-ray that permit us to remove the forest layer and see the morphology of the terrain in areas still covered by the forest. We've identified an extensive network of roads connecting different archaeological places in the southwestern Amazonia, between Brazil, Bolivia, and Peru.

We see A, B, C, and D, with different sites of diverse formats and straight lines. There was a network of roads connecting different archaeological sites in this part of the southwestern Amazonia.

What's fascinating is the radical contrast with today's roads. If contemporary roads bring destruction, these ancient trails functioned as axes for creating biodiversity: people planted trees alongside the path, plant seeds, medicinal plants, and fruit-bearing plants. This process of landscape transformation, of landscape creation, was closely associated with the roads built in the past.

We have extraordinary documentation of a 19th-century traveler who toured from the Madre de Dios River in Bolivia to the Aqui River in Brazil. It was a 20-day journey, covering approximately 200 kilometers, 10 kilometers per day. What's outstanding is that in his

↓ Shaded elevation models of ancient archaeological sites in southwestern Amazonia, featuring circular village structures and radial roads. Image originally published in Saunaluoma, S., Moat, J., Pugliese, F., & Neves, E. G. (2021). Patterned Villagescapes and Road Networks in Ancient Southwestern Amazonia. Latin American Antiquity, 32(1), 173–187.



description of the journey, he constantly talks about established paths: «places with very old settlements, we followed a very good and well-cultivated road.» This traveler, during the 200 kilometers he crossed in the 19th century, I don't think he ever used a machete to cut down the forest. He walked using a network of paths that had been built and maintained by the Indigenous peoples.

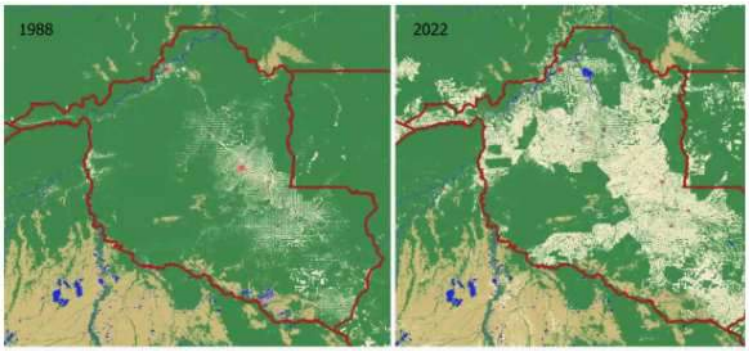
The contrast with today is dramatic. We have a millennia-long history of road construction that produced this abundant nature, and we have a sinister history in the last 50 years where paths have promoted systematic destruction.

A paradigmatic example is the Trans-Amazonian Highway, built during the Brazilian military dictatorship in 1972. The entire construction work was based on the colonial premise that it was opening up an empty territory, where no one lived, that had no history, under the perspective of "A land without people, for a people without land."

The result has been a catastrophe. In Rondônia, for example, practically everything that isn't Indigenous land or natural parks has been destroyed. The first time I was there, in 1988, everything that was green was forested areas. And this was Rondônia two years ago. It's basically gone. The highway served as an axis from which secondary roads opened, further destroying the forest.

This historic investment shows us that it is possible to design infrastructures that integrate and regenerate rather than fragment and extract. Ancient paths demonstrate that connectivity doesn't have to be destructive but can be regenerative when based on a deep understanding of ecological cycles.

↓ Deforestation in Rondônia, Brazil: 1988 vs. 2022. The comparison shows the massive loss of Amazonian forest, with the remaining vegetation cover corresponding mainly to indigenous territories. Presented by E. Góes Neves in the course "Community expertise and other expertise in the protection of natural and cultural heritage," UASB, Quito, 2024.



● The climate crisis confronts the ancient rhythms of traditional knowledge with the destructive acceleration of global capitalism. In the Amazonia, this manifests itself in unprecedented droughts, altered water cycles, and massive fires. **Based on your experience working directly in these affected territories, how can you articulate the current climate urgency with the profound temporalities revealed by archaeology?**

Climate change is a very serious issue that is happening, and it is being felt deeply in Brazil and elsewhere. We are experiencing a very severe process of destruction, and more recently, the effects of climate change have been felt catastrophically. Brazil has already lost 20% of the Amazonia's original vegetation.

A concrete and alarming example: this year we've seen the Amazon River dry up to a degree I never imagined I'd witness in my lifetime. This is the Amazon River near Tefé, a city in the Brazilian Amazon. This is the Amazon River during the dry season, and this is the river at the same location last year.

↓ The Amazon River near Tefé under normal water conditions. Photo: Lalo de Almeida. Submitted by Eduardo Góes Neves.

↓ The Amazon River near Tefé during the October 2023 drought. The dramatic drop in water levels exposed large areas of sediment and left boats stranded. Photo: Lalo de Almeida. Submitted by Eduardo Góes Neves.

This channel of the Amazon River dried up, and it's going to dry up again this year. This is directly related to climate change: deforestation is generating increasingly severe drought.

Regional connection is essential for the problem's magnitude understanding. The rains that fall in distant areas of Brazil, far from the Amazonia, come precisely from the Amazonia. The winds come from the Atlantic Ocean, receive the transpiration of the Amazonian trees, which is transformed into water vapor. These winds travel to the Andes mountain range. Some cross toward the Pacific, but another part continues through the mountain range, bringing rain that falls in regions that even feed Brazilian agribusiness. But if there is less rain in the forest due to deforestation, there is less transpiration from the trees, therefore less rain in those distant regions.

Another direct consequence is the dramatic increase in forest fires. It's a diabolical, self-reinforcing process: less forest generates more drought; more drought facilitates more fires; more fires destroy more forest. These roads promote both

illegal deforestation and logging, as well as the spread of fires.

Nevertheless, archaeological evidence and current experience demonstrate that Indigenous peoples are still the best guardians of the forest: there is virtually no destruction in Indigenous territories, while surrounding areas suffer massive devastation. These peoples are heirs to an ancient tradition of managing, cultivating, and transforming nature that Western science is only now beginning to understand.

That's why I want to share a project we're working on, Amazonia Revealed, with more than 20 archaeologists alongside Indigenous peoples, peasant farmers, and Afro-Brazilians living in the Amazonia. In this project, we use LiDAR technology to map archaeological sites covered by vegetation, located right around what we call the arc of deforestation. In Brazil, once an archaeological site is officially registered, it receives an additional layer of legal protection, so the idea is to create a wall of registered sites just ahead of the advance of destruction.

Another remarkable thing we do in this project is avoid repeating colonialist practices. There's always a risk that scientists arrive, conduct flights, report their results, and publish articles without involving the communities. We believe it's essential to conduct prior consultations, to talk with the people before deciding where to conduct flights. For example, when we spoke with the Kikuru people of the Alto Xingu, they ultimately said they didn't want the flights because they might reveal information about sacred territories, and we completely respected that decision. It's a process of listening, talking, learning, and deciding together.

This approach is fundamental because more than 60 Indigenous groups still live in voluntary isolation in the Brazilian Amazonia, as is the case in

Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia. Even with progressive governments like Brazil's current one, there are many development projects that mean a serious threat to the Amazonia. We have an oil exploration project at the mouth of the Amazon River, which unites even the left and right sides of Brazil. There are projects for new hydroelectric plants and dams that are a tragedy. There is a railway called Ferrogrão to bring all the soybeans from central Brazil to the Amazonia, with impacts that pass through Indigenous territories.

I often say, when I'm invited to participate in debates about the future of the Amazonia, that for me, the future of the Amazonia lies in the past. We have to look back a bit, obviously not repeat practices that are very old, but I think we have a lot to learn by looking at practices that were established in the past and that continue to be reproduced today under the knowledge systems of the traditional Indigenous and peasant peoples who live in the Amazonia basin.

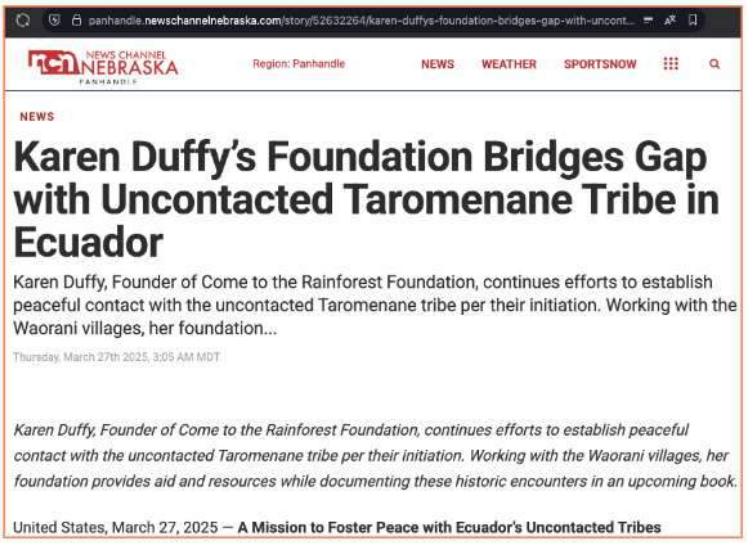
The question I ask myself then is: Are we going to repeat the same mistakes, after so many we've made, and with the capacity we have to understand the effects and consequences of these development projects? I believe that if we look at the past, if we look at what archaeology tells us, and above all, if we listen to traditional peoples, we can find much more interesting, creative, and fair ways of proposing development for ourselves, for the Amazonia, and for Latin America.

Waorani Nationality Denounces: North American Foundation Threatens Uncontacted Peoples with Contact Attempts

The Ecuadorian Amazonia is facing an unprecedented crisis due to the advance of oil extraction and the presence of organized crime, which have fragmented vital ecosystems and threatened the survival of Indigenous peoples. In this context of territorial emergency and lack of state control—particularly in the Yasuní National Park area—the actions of external actors such as U.S. citizen Karen Duffy and her foundation Come to the Rainforest demonstrate how third parties can negatively interfere in the territory. According to a public complaint by the Waorani Nationality of Ecuador (NAWE, its acronym in Spanish), Duffy has severely violated the rights of the Tagaeri and Taromenane peoples in voluntary isolation by attempting to establish direct contact.

The gravity of these actions is evident in Duffy's own statements, who, with complete ignorance of the complex conflict processes and the extreme sensitivity of the situation, has publicly promoted «efforts to establish peaceful contact with the uncontacted Taromenane tribe» and has documented «historical interactions» that she plans to publish in a book. These statements reveal a dangerous ignorance of international protocols and the recent landmark ruling of March 2025 by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, which found the Ecuadorian State responsible for multiple violations of the rights of Indigenous Peoples in Voluntary Isolation (PIAV, its acronym in Spanish), including violations of the rights

↓ Source: News Channel Nebraska, "Karen Duffy's Foundation Bridges Gap with Uncontacted Taromenane Tribe in Ecuador", March 27, 2025. https://panhandle.newschannelnebraska.com/story/52632264/karen-duffys-foundation-bridges-gap-with-uncontacted-taromenane-tribe-in-ecuador



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NEWS

Karen Duffy's Foundation Bridges Gap with Uncontacted Taromenane Tribe in Ecuador

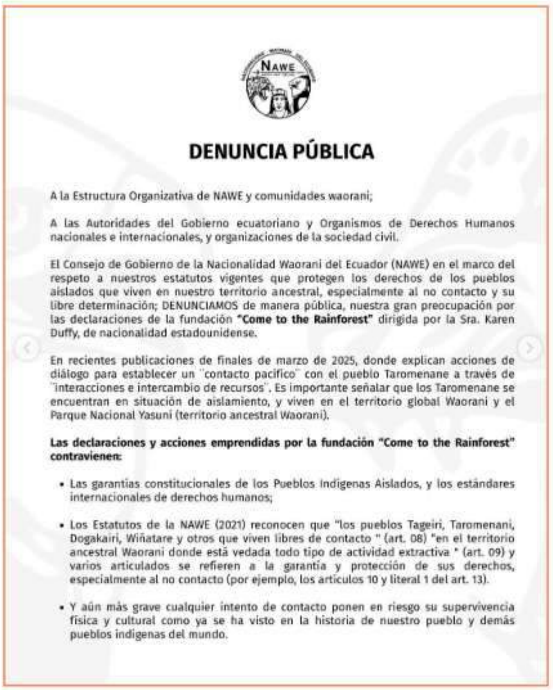
Karen Duffy, Founder of Come to the Rainforest Foundation, continues efforts to establish peaceful contact with the uncontacted Taromenane tribe per their initiation. Working with the Waorani villages, her foundation...

Thursday, March 27th 2025, 3:05 AM MDT

Karen Duffy, Founder of Come to the Rainforest Foundation, continues efforts to establish peaceful contact with the uncontacted Taromenane tribe per their initiation. Working with the Waorani villages, her foundation provides aid and resources while documenting these historic encounters in an upcoming book.

United States, March 27, 2025 — **A Mission to Foster Peace with Ecuador's Uncontacted Tribes**

↓ Source: Waorani Nationality of Ecuador (NAWE), public denouncement regarding violation of indigenous rights, Instagram [@nawe.org.ec], April 15, 2025. https://www.instagram.com/p/DIeuck6PMNz/?img_index=1



NAWE

DENUNCIA PÚBLICA

A la Estructura Organizativa de NAWE y comunidades waorani;

A las Autoridades del Gobierno ecuatoriano y Organismos de Derechos Humanos nacionales e internacionales, y organizaciones de la sociedad civil.

El Consejo de Gobierno de la Nacionalidad Waorani del Ecuador (NAWE) en el marco del respeto a nuestros estatutos vigentes que protegen los derechos de los pueblos aislados que viven en nuestro territorio ancestral, especialmente al no contacto y su libre determinación; DENUNCIAMOS de manera pública, nuestra gran preocupación por las declaraciones de la fundación **"Come to the Rainforest"** dirigida por la Sra. Karen Duffy, de nacionalidad estadounidense.

En recientes publicaciones de finales de marzo de 2025, donde explican acciones de diálogo para establecer un "contacto pacífico" con el pueblo Taromenane a través de "interacciones e intercambio de recursos". Es importante señalar que los Taromenane se encuentran en situación de aislamiento, y viven en el territorio global Waorani y el Parque Nacional Yasuní (territorio ancestral Waorani).

Las declaraciones y acciones emprendidas por la fundación "Come to the Rainforest" contravienen:

- Las garantías constitucionales de los Pueblos Indígenas Aislados, y los estándares internacionales de derechos humanos;
- Los Estatutos de la NAWE (2021) reconocen que "los pueblos Tageiri, Taromenani, Dogakairi, Wiñatare y otros que viven libres de contacto " (art. 08) "en el territorio ancestral Waorani donde está vedada todo tipo de actividad extractiva " (art. 09) y varios articulados se refieren a la garantía y protección de sus derechos, especialmente al no contacto (por ejemplo, los artículos 10 y literal 1 del art. 13).
- Y aún más grave cualquier intento de contacto ponen en riesgo su supervivencia física y cultural como ya se ha visto en la historia de nuestro pueblo y demás pueblos indígenas del mundo.

to collective property, housing, self-determination, a dignified life, and a healthy environment. The court specifically ordered the State to adopt protective measures and recognize that these ecosystemic peoples have different thresholds of tolerance due to their isolation.

According to NAWE, this case highlights how the lack of territorial control allows external agents to negatively interfere, reinforcing the urgent need for the definitive closure of oil facilities in the Yasuní, the recovery of the territory for Indigenous peoples, and the full exercise of their self-determination. The organization denounces the systematic state abandonment that forces many Waorani to walk up to eight hours to reach health centers that lack the necessary resources or trained professionals, abandoned educational centers with absent teachers or without adequate intercultural training, and limited access to sources of safe water due to contamination.

Local communities have initiated monitoring processes for the care of their territory and their communities and have begun planting chonta and other plants to demarcate the paths that connect and communicate the territory; nevertheless, these initiatives do not exempt the State from assuming its responsibilities. The true closure must go beyond the removal of infrastructure, including overcoming the extractive model and fully restoring nature, guaranteeing the rights that constitute a historical debt to the peoples of Yasuní.

[The english texts of this Bulletin N° 10 were edited by María Belén Moncayo]