

We, the peoples of the Amazon, are full of fear. Soon you will be too

You destroy our lands, poison the planet and sow death,
because you are lost. And soon it will be too late to change

by Raoni Metuktire | The Guardian newspaper, September 2nd 2019

For many years we, the indigenous leaders and peoples of the Amazon, have been warning you, our brothers who have brought so much damage to our forests. What you are doing will change the whole world and will destroy our home – and it will destroy your home too.

We have set aside our divided history to come together. Only a generation ago, many of our tribes were fighting each other, but now we are together, fighting together against our common enemy. And that common enemy is you, the non-indigenous peoples who have invaded our lands and are now burning even those small parts of the forests where we live that you have left for us. President Bolsonaro of Brazil is encouraging the farm owners near our lands to clear the forest – and he is not doing anything to prevent them from invading our territory.

We call on you to stop what you are doing, to stop the destruction, to stop your attack on the spirits of the Earth. When you cut down the trees you assault the spirits of our ancestors. When you dig for minerals you impale the heart of the Earth. And when you pour poisons on the land and into the rivers – chemicals from agriculture and mercury from gold mines – you weaken the spirits, the plants, the animals and the land itself. When you weaken the land like that, it starts to die. If the land dies, if our Earth dies, then none of us will be able to live, and we too will all die.

Why do you do this? You say it is for development – but what kind of development takes away the richness of the forest and replaces it with just one kind of plant or one kind of animal? Where the spirits once gave us everything we needed for a happy life – all of our food, our houses, our medicines – now there is only soya or cattle. Who is this development for?

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Only a few people live on the farm lands; they cannot support many people and they are barren.

So why do you do this? We can see that it is so that some of you can get a great deal of money. In the Kayapó language we call your money piu caprim, “sad leaves”, because it is a dead and useless thing, and it brings only harm and sadness.

When your money comes into our communities it often causes big problems, driving our people apart. And we can see that it does the same thing in your cities, where what you call rich people live isolated from everyone else, afraid that other people will come to take their piu caprim away from them. Meanwhile other people starve or live in misery because they don't have enough money to get food for themselves and their children.

But those rich people will die, as we all will die. And when their spirits are separated from their bodies their spirits will be sad and they will suffer, because while they are alive they have made so many other people suffer instead of helping them, instead of making sure that everyone else has enough to eat before they feed themselves, which is our way, the way of the Kayapó, the way of indigenous people.

You have to change the way you live because you are lost, you have lost your way. Where you are going is only the way of destruction and of death. To live you must respect the world, the trees, the plants, the animals, the rivers and even the very earth itself. Because all of these things have spirits, all of these things are spirits, and without the spirits the Earth will die, the rain will stop and the food plants will wither and die too.

We all breathe this one air, we all drink the same water. We live on this one planet. We need to protect the Earth. If we don't, the big winds will come and destroy the forest.

Then you will feel the fear that we feel.

- *Raoni Metuktire is an environmentalist and chief of the indigenous Brazilian Kayapó people*

ALSO: Explainer video from Sabrina Fernandes youtu.be/TfiutlJ7uWc
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