

The Yanomamis: the British royal family's personal 'noble savages'

by Silvia Palacios and Gretchen Small

In 1991, the governments of Venezuela and Brazil issued separate decrees designating a contiguous cross-border area totalling 178,000 square kilometers (nearly the size of Uruguay) as an "anthropological reserve" for the Yanomamis, a group of, at most, 16,000 desperately backward, semi-nomadic Indians.

The creation of that "reserve" has been a project of the British royal family for nearly 25 years. The World Wide Fund for Nature's (formerly World Wildlife Fund, WWF) "peoples" division, Survival International, was founded in 1969 to lead the campaign. Princes Charles and Philip went to Brazil in 1990 and 1991 to promote the project, the WWF ran an international publicity and pressure campaign for the park, and British Minister of Overseas Development Lady Lynda Chalker was sent to Brazil in 1990 to ram it through.

In July 1991, Sir Walter Bodmer, president of the Human Genome Organization, said that the Yanomamis would be the first tribe to have their genes frozen and archived in London's Museum of Human Genetics. It was to be the first entry in a planned "library" of genes of "peoples in extinction."

The following chronology relates the highlights of the story, but we add a cautionary note. Both Presidents who implemented this British Crown scheme, Brazil's Fernando Collor de Mello and Venezuela's Carlos Andrés Pérez, were driven out of office on corruption charges in 1992 and 1993, respectively. The governments which succeeded them have as yet been unwilling to push through the Crown's full demand: the separation of the reserves from their nations.

The chronology

1971: Survival International (SI) President Robin Hanbury-Tenison visits 33 Indian tribes in Brazil and endorses the creation of "a national park of Yanomami." SI becomes the leading international non-governmental organization (NGO) pushing the Yanomami project.

1972: Two SI founding members, Francis Huxley and current Royal Geographic Society Director John Hemming, are sent to Brazil by the Aborigines Protection Society of Lord Buxton's Anti-Slavery International. Their final report declares that the proposed Yanomami park "could well be a test case of Brazilian government policy."

1978: The Commission for the Creation of the Yanomami Park (CCPY), a Brazilian NGO, is established. SI anthropol-

ogist Bruce Albert authors the CCPY's proposal for a single 6.4 million hectare Indian park to be created on the Brazilian side of the border, which would allow 8,400 Yanomamis to continue their lifestyle of "intermittent nomadism."

1979: SI issues an "urgent action bulletin" on Yanomamis to members, urging that they pressure the Brazilian government. Bulletins are issued approximately annually thereafter. "The Yanomami became Survival International's number-one priority," wrote SI President Hanbury-Tenison.

1980: British anthropologist and SI collaborator Marcus Colchester issues a proposal for a similar park on the Venezuelan side of the border.

1981: Hanbury-Tenison, a photographer, and an anthropologist are paid by Time-Life Books to live with Albert and his Yanomamis for two months. *Aborigines of the Amazon Rain Forest* is published the following year. Hanbury-Tenison later describes the Yanomami practice of infanticide as "a system . . . which works excellently for them," and said that their system of hunting and gathering allows them to live "in contented affluence."

1985: The Organization of American States urges Brazil to create a Yanomami park to preserve their lifestyle and "culture." Sen. Severo Gomes joins the CCPY and sponsors legislation calling for the creation of a Yanomami park, getting the support of Cong. Fabio Feldman and Sen. Fernando Henrique Cardoso, today President-elect of Brazil.

1989: Yanomami activist Davi Kopenawa receives the U.N.'s Global 500 award. SI receives the Right Livelihood Award, and invites Kopenawa to receive it.

Sept. 14, 1989: Anne Roderick, owner of The Body Shop cosmetics stores selling "Amazon products," leads NGOs in a demonstration blocking access to the Brazilian embassy in London, protesting the "devastation of the Amazon." Participating groups include Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, Oxfam, Forest Peoples Support Group, Brazil Network, and Survival International.

Sept. 30, 1989: Brazil Network and the Catholic Institute for International Relations co-sponsor a seminar in Sheffield, England, titled "Amazonia: Whose Environment, Whose Struggle?" to organize an international federation of NGOs to coordinate all Amazon environmental campaigns.

1990: SI issues an appeal by Prince Charles against the "collective genocide" of the Yanomamis. "Any discussion about the tropical forests should start by looking at . . . the

remaining tribal people for whom the tropical forest has been their home for many generations," said Charles.

May 1990: Prince Charles invites Brazilian Environment Minister José Lutzenberger to London, announcing that he and "Lutz" share a "holistic" view of environmental problems. Charles attends a Friends of the Earth forum where "Lutz" is a speaker, and later raises the Yanomami issue with Brazil's then-President-elect Collor de Mello.

October 1990: Lady Lynda Chalker, British Minister for Overseas Development, visits Brasilia to prepare the upcoming visit of Prince Charles to the Amazon. With Lutzenberger at her side, she announces that the Overseas Development Administration (ODA) wishes to finance health programs for the Yanomamis. She signs various Anglo-Brazilian environmental cooperation accords, and attends a seminar on ecology co-sponsored by Imperial Chemical Industries and the ODA. Chalker announces that the ODA will finance a "scientific station" in the 315,000-hectare ecological reserve in Caxiupana, in Pará state, near the Amazon. (For Chalker's role in the 1994 Rwanda war, see *EIR*, Oct. 28, p. 48.)

1990: "International campaign forces the government to open Yanomami lands to support organizations," *SI* wrote.

March 1991: Prince Philip visits the Una ecological re-

serve in Salvador, Bahia state, Brazil, where his WWF has donated 659 hectares of land.

April 23-27, 1991: Prince Charles visits Brazil, accompanied by international ecological bigwigs including Canada's Maurice Strong, Britain's Environment Minister David Triepier, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency head William Reilly, European Community Environment Commissioner Carlo Ripa di Meana, and British Petroleum head Sir Robert Horton. Charles holds a two-day private meeting on the royal yacht *Britannia* on the Amazon River with Lutzenberger and Brazilian businessmen Israel Klabin, José Safra, and others. President Collor attends an evening session aboard the yacht with cabinet ministers.

June 1991: Venezuelan President Carlos Andrés Pérez issues a decree creating the 8.4 million hectare Upper Orinoco-Casiquire Biosphere Reserve for the Yanomamis along the Venezuelan-Brazilian border. All previous Venezuelan governments had refused to establish a biosphere reserve, because this involves international accords which grant international agencies inspection and other rights in the area.

June 1991: Prince Philip invites Brazilian Congressman Feldman, SOS Mata Atlantica ecological chief José Pedro de Oliveria Costa, and WWF-Brazil Association head José

'Lutz' and Feldman: British Crown agents in Brazil

Two agents of the British royal family have been indispensable for the Yanomami project in Brazil: José Lutzenberger, Brazil's minister of the environment in 1990-92 under the now-deposed Fernando Collor de Mello government, and "green" Congressman Fabio Feldman.

Lutzenberger works closely with the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and Prince Charles. A former agronomist with the German firm BASF, "Lutz" heads Brazil's Fundação Gaia, a branch of London's Gaia Foundation, whose board includes former Imperial Chemical International president Sir John Harvery Jones and Prince Charles's Jungian philosophical mentor Sir Laurent van der Post. In 1989, the Gaia Foundation issued a fundraising pamphlet, "The Need of Lutz and Fundação Gaia Projected over the Next Five Years," soliciting funds so that their Brazilian agent could "become financially secure personally," which promised that "the Gaia Foundation, London, will continue to raise funds to cover these ongoing running costs of Fundação Gaia."

In his 1976 book *End of the Future?—A Brazilian Ecological Manifesto*, Lutzenberger wrote: "Demographic controls always exist. Among the most primitive be-

ings, it is blind, intermittent, and brutal. A population of bacteria, facing a propitious environment, grows exponentially. . . . But well . . . before consuming all the resources, it ends up dying in its own toxins. Equilibrium is established. . . . What an irony! Man, 'the crown of creation' . . . with all his intellectual capacity, his science, his technology, is preparing to return to subjecting himself to blind and implacable forces; he is preparing to return to the level of a bacterium."

Feldman, a lawyer, founder of several environmental organizations (e.g., OIKOS, SOS Mata Atlantica), and a congressman of the Party of the Brazilian Social-Democracy, has led anti-Brazil campaigns on both the environment and "indigenous rights." Feldman works closely with the WWF, Amnesty International, the World Resources Institute (he is one of the signers of WRI's Compact for a New World), the Smithsonian Institution, and Friends of the Earth. Feldman is a board member of Conservation International, a split from the Nature Conservancy headed by WWF Vice President for International Programs Russel Mittermeier.

In 1989, Mittermeier and Feldman called for an international "green bloc" of congressmen. In October 1990, Feldman served as "prosecutor" of Brazil in a mock trial for genocide carried out by the "Permanent Court of the Peoples" in Europe. In 1991, Prince Philip invited him to London to discuss how to expand WWF activities in Brazil.

Theodoro Araujo to London to discuss broadening WWF activities in Brazil.

June 1991: Brazilian President Collor visits Washington, where U.S. President George Bush hands him a letter protesting the Brazilian government's delay in demarcating "Yanomami land," signed by eight Democratic senators—Albert Gore (Tenn.), Timothy Wirth (Colo.), Alan Cranston (Calif.), Paul Wellstone (Minn.), Dennis DeConcini (Ariz.), Daniel Patrick Moynihan (N.Y.), Tom Harkin (Iowa), and Ted Kennedy (Mass.). Returning to Brazil, Collor fires the president of Brazil's National Indian Foundation, and appoints Sidney Possuelo, a collaborator of Lutzenberger, as its new head. Possuelo pledges to demarcate Indian lands rapidly.

September 1991: The Brazilian Congress's Special Commission on Threats to the Amazon requests that Lutzenberger resign as environment minister, arguing that he is opposed to the development of the country and is in the pay of the British Gaia Foundation.

October 1991: WWF Director Henner Ehringhaus visits Brazil, meets with Collor, and threatens that "the prestige of the Collor government in the opinion of the international public . . . owes much" to Lutzenberger. British MP John Battle visits Brazil and informs Collor that the British government is very concerned with the Yanomamis.

Nov. 15, 1991: Collor signs the Yanomami Park decree.

Documentation

A 'green wall' for a concentration camp

To stop the Yanomamis from changing their lifestyle, is to assure their early death. The Yanomamis are not a homogeneous group, but some 200 independent communities, which speak four different dialects, have no written language, and no precise numerical system. One of the most violent and bloody human groups on the planet, an estimated 44% of all Yanomami men over the age of 25 have participated in the murder of at least one person. Roughly 30% of Yanomami adults die by violent means. In the mid-1980s, the average life span of Yanomami Indians in Venezuela was 30 years, as contrasted with a national average of 65 years. Some Yanomami communities practice cannibalism; others kill unwanted babies (such as first-born who are female, who are deformed, and who are considered a burden).

The information on national life span is found in a confidential government study published in the Venezuelan daily *El Universal* on Aug. 8 and 9, 1984. The study, carried out by officials from the Border Division of the Ministry of Foreign Relations, and others, charged that those pushing for

indigenous or ecological reserves would reproduce South Africa's bantustans in the Americas, denying Indians their full rights as citizens and denying their nations "the contributions of an important part of its citizenry."

Architects of the Yanomami reserves admit that, when allowed, many Yanomamis seek to change their lifestyle and culture. In Survival International's 1979 proposal for a Yanomami park in Brazil, anthropologist Bruce Albert argued that a park is needed to keep tribes from migrating, given "the attraction presented by the Venezuelan national society."

Venezuelan ecologist Antonio De Lisio, in a speech to the 48th International Congress of the Society of the Americanists in Stockholm, Sweden in July 1994 (and based on an ongoing joint study of the Upper Orinoco by the Center for the Study of the Environment, Cenamb, of the Central University of Venezuela, and the University of Venice, Italy), insisted that stricter controls be imposed on access to the Venezuelan Biosphere Reserve, because *the Yanomamis seek change*. Acculturation "is reinforced," he complains, "with the attitude to change shown by the Yanomamis; observe, for instance, their migration from interfluvial to riparian forest and from mountains to plains, seeking their encounter with the missions. Not even the difficulties of accessibility guarantee the retarding of this global process."

De Lisio outlined the following "conservationist scenario" to guarantee "appropriate environmental use" of the Upper Orinoco River Basin:

"It is necessary to build a 'green wall' to preserve the Yanomamis. It is necessary to forbid whatever contact between these communities and the agents of change because:

"The missions, evangelists, and Salesians have introduced working tools which have modified Yanomamis' productivity in their traditional hunting and fishing activities.

". . . The missions promote Yanomamis' becoming sedentary, altering in a significant manner their traditional worldview. The Yanomamis, then, by searching for superfluous goods, become tied to some zones and establish alliances with other communities to make it easier to have direct access to manufactured products.

"Some government policies for health and education pull them out from their habits and customs. . . .

"Therefore, it is necessary that:

"1. The missions, Salesians, and evangelists pull out of the Upper Orinoco River Basin;

"2. The government of Venezuela minimize its presence along the Brazilian border and achieve its security and defense activities by means of existing technologies . . . ;

"3. Mining activity be suspended . . . with clear criteria as to the necessity to preserve the headwaters and the water sources from contamination produced by this activity, and conserve the characteristic vegetation of this area, promoting in this way the prohibition of mining activity.

"4. To redefine health policies and deter all educational activities that modify Yanomamis' cosmovision and social structures or magic-religious [sic]."