

Awa Rainforest – An Amazing Diversity Threatened by Thirst for Resources

A land conflict for plantations, resource exploitation and sustainable farming

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The Andes Region in Colombia



Location

The Awá Rainforest

- Located between Southern Colombia and Northern Ecuador
- Part of Biogeographic Chocó, one of the last coastal tropical rainforests on Earth

Problem definition

The Awa Rainforest is **rich in resources like water, oil, fertile soil, minerals, timbers, and biodiversity**, demonstrating a strategic interest for both legal and illegal businesses. The indigenous communities are caught in the middle of this battle, sometimes described as the world's oldest internal armed conflict, and are at risk of extinction. Thus the collateral damage has produced long term damage to the environment. If this dispute is not solved in the near future, the cultural heritage of indigenous tribes, the land and all of its natural resources are at stake.

- Exploit resources (oil, wood, etc.) and soil for commercial use
- Oil Pipelines

- Farming
- Hunting for own purposes
- Sacred function of land



- Land use for drug plantation
- Establish headquarters for drug distribution
- Landmines

Main conflict characteristics



Very violent



Corrupt: Firms buy permission to exploit



Powerlessness of victims and government lead to total escalation

- Protect natural resources and indigenous people
- Chemical spraying against illicit crops

Companies

Awa Tribe

Government

Illegal Armed Groups

- Protect natural resources and indigenous people

NGOs



Consequences

- Oil spills
- Deforestation
- Diseases and health problems
- Conflicts for geopolitical control
- Loss of biodiversity
- Contamination of air, rivers and streams

Proposed solution

- Raise national and international awareness of the situation to increase pressure to address the issues
- Social rather than military investment in the region
- Reservation of the rights over the land (titles for Awas)
- Enforcement of Sentence T024-2013 (regulations for entities involved)
- Compensation of victims - Transition and compensation laws

Existing measures

- 1959 - Forest Reserves Law - Awa Ethnic Reserve in Ecuador (1990)
- 1982 - Indigenous National Organization of Colombia (ONIC)
- 1991 - Indigenous territories established - titles are not handed over
- 2000 - Reports about problems of spraying published since
- 2004 - Court demands protection of territories and communities
- 2014 - Political tour in Europe – Environmental issues not the focus

Development of escalation

- Illegal armed groups (FARC) occupy the land, try to pursue Awas for own cultivation purposes and drug traffic: Any opponents are murdered
- Oil pipelines are installed throughout the Awa region

- Inhabitants are murdered being accused as information suppliers
- Military enters the land and tries to receive information about armed groups

- Government sends military to protect Awa region from exploitation, military is abusing Awas

- Fight between the government and FARC
- Government blocks transport routes of drug traffickers
- Government guarantees land for Awas
- NGOs try to raise awareness of human rights through internet and go to court

- Massive land deterioration by unrooting plants, felling trees and disruption by dredgers
- Unarmed Awas unable to cast out companies
- Eligible governmental permission

1970s

1990s

2002

2009

2012

Stage in Yasmi escalation process

1. Feeling anxiety
2. Debate and critique
3. Lobby and persuasion
4. Protest and campaigning
5. Access restrictions
6. Court
7. Intimidation and physical exchange
8. Nationalization and internationalization

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