

Brazil's Javari valley threatened by Peruvian oil, warn tribes

(Abridged from) *The Guardian*, 28 November 2014

An indigenous people whose territories are divided by the Brazil-Peru border in the remote Amazon say they are vehemently opposed to oil exploration on the Peruvian side and are prepared to fight companies in order to keep them out. The Matsés's main concerns are the potential social and environmental impacts of oil operations on both sides of the border, where they live in the far west of the iconic Javari Valley Indigenous Territory in Brazil and a 490,000 hectare legally-titled community in Peru.

"I don't want to die contaminated or from some illness transmitted [by a company]," Waki Mayoruna, the head of a village called Lobo, told the Guardian on a visit to the Javari Territory. "If they don't understand our no means no, there'll be conflict that'll lead to people being killed."

The licence to operate on the Peruvian side is held by Canada-based company Pacific Rubiales Energy

Earlier this month numerous Matsés in Brazil crossed the border into Peru to attend a bi-national, three day meeting for Matsés from both countries, which was held in a village called Santa Rosa and concluded with them "totally rejecting" both concessions.

"We maintain the position of not permitting the oil company to enter," Cesar Nacua Uakui, from a village called Estirón on the Peruvian side, told the meeting. "It doesn't matter if they kill us. We must look after our land for our children."

The Matsés issued a statement ratifying their decision and alluding to "serious social and environmental contamination" caused by oil operations in other parts of Peru, and the "continued use of contaminating practices" and "little will to remedy environmental damages."

Numerous Matsés told the Guardian, during visits to villages in both Brazil and Peru after the meeting, that they were prepared to fight oil company personnel – with spears, bows and arrows – if they turned up in their territories.

"They should respect indigenous peoples' rights, but in my view they're not doing so," says Lorenzo Tumi, from Puerto Alegre in Peru. "The only weapon we have is to kill one of them. They have their powers – we have our powers too."

"We'll always fight against the invasion of our territories," says José Tumi, from Sao Meireles in Brazil. "If they don't listen, we could fight like we did before, with bows and arrows."

Last year a delegation of indigenous peoples from the Javari Territory in Brazil, including Marubos, Matís and Kanamaris as well as Matsés, travelled to Brasilia to express their concern about Lot 135 and Lot 137 to Brazil's Foreign Ministry and Peruvian government representatives.

"The Matsés have lived for a long time in the River Yaquerana region – long before the border was imposed by the Brazilian and Peruvian governments," OGM stated to the Ministry. "Anything affecting the Matsés on the Peruvian side affects us [on the Brazilian side], and vice versa." The River Yaquerana – which is the principle source of the River Javari, acts as the Brazil-Peru border, and is used by the Matsés in both countries for drinking, cooking, washing, bathing and fishing.

Many Matsés are also opposed to [the project] because of the IPVI (1) living upriver on both sides of the border who have almost no interaction with outsiders and could be decimated by contact with oil company personnel. Numerous Matsés expressed concern to the Guardian and during the bi-national meeting about the potential impacts on the IPVI, and their statement calls for the "immediate termination" of operations in both concessions because of the threats to their lives and territory.

(1) IPVI : **Indigenous People** living in what Peruvian law calls '**Voluntary Isolation**'.