



The Deni and Demarcation

The Deni Indians live in a remote area of the Amazon rainforest. With a population of just over 600 people, and little contact with the outside world, the forest is their home and source of livelihood. But an area where the Deni live was being bought and sold, and slated for destruction without their knowledge, until now. The Deni are taking the future of their territory into their own hands and will begin the physical demarcation of their land in September to protect their territory from logging and further development.

Greenpeace began working with the Deni two years ago after Greenpeace discovered that WTK, the Malaysian logging giant, had purchased lands that overlapped with the Deni territory in the Brazilian Amazon. Due to its record as a global forest destroyer, WTK had been on the Greenpeace radar since the Amazon campaign was in its initial research period.

In 1997, an investigation by the Brazilian Congress revealed that a local Amazon patron, Mario Moraes, who claims ownership of over 1,000,000 hectares of forest, had been selling off Deni lands. WTK had purchased 313,000 hectares from Sr. Moraes, of which about 150,000 hectares overlapped with the Deni lands. However, the Deni people were not informed of this transaction until two years later, when a Greenpeace team reached their remote villages on the Cuniua River, in the Purus River Basin of the southern Amazon. In May 1999, Greenpeace campaigners Paulo Adario and Nilo D'Avila met Deni leaders and, struggling to overcome communication barriers, told the Deni that a portion of their lands had been sold to a company that would come to cut down trees.

The Deni were shocked. They have been suffering disease and death due to contacts with colonists over the past 60 years, and they did not understand how this latest problem could occur. After all, they first heard about the demarcation of their lands back in 1985, when the first FUNAI (National Indigenous Foundation, the Federal Government agency in charge of indigenous issues in Brazil) representatives came to their villages to raise the issue with them.

The demarcation of lands is a mere recognition by the government of what is, has been and will always be indigenous domain. The demarcation guarantees to the indigenous population the right to keep invaders out of their lands and to choose their means of living in the forest.

The Deni requested the help of Greenpeace to fight for their demarcation. They understood that the demarcation is a critical first step to guarantee the integrity of the environment they depend upon. It was the only legal way to keep WTK, and other invaders, outside of the borders of their homeland.

By April 2001, more than two years after the first Greenpeace visit to the Deni and 16 years after the Deni were first told about demarcation, some things had changed. For six months, Greenpeace, our two partner organizations, Operação Amazônia Nativa and Conselho Indigenista Missionário, and a multi-skilled team that included anthropologists, indigenous issues experts, sociologists and agriculture engineers worked directly with Deni leaders from all eight villages preparing them to take charge of their demarcation.

This "self-demarcation" is not common. Usually the federal government sends in anthropologists, geographers, and inspectors who determine the range of the Indian community's lands, write reports and draw a map, submit their findings to FUNAI, and await the approval of the physical demarcation. Once approved, FUNAI contracts a company to go to the land and cut a border through the jungle, marking the outer limits of the property. The Indians themselves are usually involved only peripherally. But the Deni grew tired of waiting for the government to demarcate their land; they want to finish the demarcation process now before any other logging companies attempt to invade their territory.

Greenpeace, OPAN and CIMI provided the Deni with workshops on maps and mapping, lessons on angles and degrees and theoretical and practical classes on demarcation. The Deni learned how to handle survey equipment such as theodolites and compasses, and they now have a clear notion of the borders of their lands and are able to follow the step-by-step process of physical demarcation.

The physical demarcation will begin in September opening up one and a half metre wide trails in the forest creating a visible border between indigenous land and other territories. At their invitation, Greenpeace is sending in volunteers to assist the Deni, document the demarcation and bear witness to their fight for the protection of their lands. By mid-October, after almost 20 years, demarcated paths of hundreds of kilometres will be in place to protect the Deni culture and their 1,600,000 hectares of pristine forest in the heart of the Amazon from invading transnational companies and local loggers.



The Deni and Demarcation: facts and figures

- Officially, there are 556 indigenous lands in Brazil, of which 383 are located within the Amazon region. According to FUNAI, only half of the indigenous lands in Brazil have been officially demarcated and around 1/5 have not even started the process.
- If all indigenous lands of the Brazilian Amazon were demarcated, almost 20 percent of its forest area would come under legal protection.
- The Federal Constitution of Brazil (1988) stated that all indigenous lands should be demarcated by 1995. Six years after the deadline, there are still over 100 indigenous lands without even this basic protection.
- Spanning 1,600,000 hectares, the Deni territory is the largest indigenous land still to be demarcated in Brazil's Amazonas State. It will link up with six other indigenous lands to create an ecological corridor of more than 3,000,000 hectares of pristine forest.
- The 670 Deni people depend on the resources of their territory to guarantee the continuity of their traditional means of living, and of their basic survival. Semi-nomadic people, they need extensive tracts of lands to hunt and plant. Demarcation is the government's recognition of the limits of their territory, and can be used as a legal tool by the Deni people to keep invaders out of their lands.
- Oil extracted from the Copaiba tree is the main product traded by the Deni. The regatao (the boat-man who sells salt, fuel and other industrialised products to the Deni) pays R\$1.50 per litre of Copaiba oil while in Manaus it can sell for up to R\$ 8.00. Copaiba oil is used by the cosmetic, pharmaceutical and paint industries.
- Greenpeace first got involved with the Deni in 1999, when we discovered that the Malaysian logging giant, WTK, had purchased 150,000 hectares of forest that overlapped with the Deni territory. We carried out a strong campaign against their overseas markets to expose the multinational company, and WTK since stated that they would not log on the Deni lands. However, formal demarcation, not the verbal promises of one logging company, is the only definitive long term guarantee of protection for the Deni lands.
- Wong Tuong Kwong (WTK) is the oldest of the big five Sarawak-based Malaysian timber giants, founded in the 1960s by Datuk Wong Tuong Kwong. Since then it has evolved into a huge multinational conglomerate with over 70 subsidiaries operating in logging, wood and paper products, real estate, mineral exploration, insurance, and other far-ranging ventures. It has been described as the forest industry's leading player, controlling millions of hectares of forests around the world.
- WTK's plans to log along the Xeruã and Cuniuá rivers pose an environmental risk to the Deni and to the six other indigenous groups in the area. One of the groups, the Hi-Mariman, have never been contacted by non-Indians, and another, the Zuruahá, have very limited contact with the outside world. These very remote people could also face cultural and possibly even physical risks due to the introduction of foreign concepts, products and viruses.
- The Deni have never been contacted by WTK. They were first informed that WTK had purchased a sizeable portion of their lands in May 1999 when a Greenpeace expedition went to the area to investigate the activities of the logging giant.
- Greenpeace is not demarcating indigenous lands in the Amazon. We did, at their request, help prepare the Deni by giving them information and support so they could direct the demarcation of their own lands and, afterwards, pressure the government to enforce the law. Preparing the Deni to conduct a self-demarcation of their lands is a joint project of Greenpeace, the Indigenous Missionary Council (CIMI) <http://www.cimi.org.br/> and the Native Amazon Operation (OPAN) <http://www.opan.org.br/>.

"The Deni feeling for their territory is much stronger now. They understand all the steps to achieve demarcation, both physical and legal, and why it is so important. Moreover, they also understand the threats posed by an industrial project such as WTK's," said Greenpeace campaigner Nilo D'Avila.

"We're tired of waiting...we will demarcate our land. You have to show my words to the government. It's been 20 years of talking. I'm 30 years old and tired of talking," said Deni Chief Biruvi, 13 May 2001.