

Greta Thunberg labelled a 'brat' by Brazil's far-right leader Jair Bolsonaro

Swedish activist tweeted about murders of indigenous people

President laments press attention for 'pirralha [little brat]'

Tom Phillips *Latin America correspondent*

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Greta Thunberg tweeted: 'Indigenous people are literally being murdered for trying to protect the forest [sic] from illegal deforestation. Over and over again.' Photograph: Pablo Blázquez Domínguez/Getty Images

Brazil's far-right president **Jair Bolsonaro** has derided Greta Thunberg after the teenage climate activist added her voice to growing international condemnation of a surge of anti-indigenous violence in the Amazon.

"Indigenous people are literally being murdered for trying to protect the forest [sic] from illegal deforestation. Over and over again," **Thunberg** tweeted on Sunday alongside a video showing the aftermath of a **drive-by shooting targeting indigenous leaders** that left two dead.

"It is shameful that the world remains silent about this," the 16-year-old campaigner added.

Bolsonaro – who activists accuse of green-lighting a **new era of destruction** and violence with his hardline anti-environment rhetoric – hit back on Tuesday.

"Greta's been saying Indians have died because they were defending the Amazon," a smirking **Bolsonaro told reporters** outside the presidential palace in Brazil's capital, Brasília.

"It's amazing how much space the press gives this kind of *pirralha*," Bolsonaro added, using a Portuguese word that loosely translates as "little brat" or "pest".

Bolsonaro had initially failed to remember Thunberg's name, labelling her simply "that girl".

Thunberg appeared to take Bolsonaro's disparagement as a badge of honour, changing her Twitter biography to "Pirralha".

Thunberg is far from alone in challenging Bolsonaro over the spike in rainforest destruction and attacks on indigenous communities during his first year in power.

Brazil's Indigenous Missionary Council rights group **reported** in September that 153 indigenous territories had been invaded since the start of 2019 – more than twice last year's figure of 76 – and said Bolsonaro's "aggressive" talk was partly responsible.

Recent weeks have seen a **spate of deadly attacks** on indigenous activists.

After Saturday's killings in the northern state of Maranhão, Brazil's former environment minister, Marina Silva, **tweeted**: "This Amazon bloodbath demands a strong and swift response from Brazilian authorities."

"We have been cut adrift and left unprotected by the Brazilian state," **wrote** Sônia Guajajara, a prominent indigenous leader.

In a recent interview, the Amazon senator Randolfe Rodrigues said Brazil's native peoples stood at a historic juncture as Bolsonaro pushed ahead with plans to open their lands to commercial mining.

"Not since the [1964-85] dictatorship have Brazil's indigenous peoples felt as threatened as they do now," Rodrigues said.

Amazon indigenous leaders killed in Brazil drive-by shooting

Gunmen opened fire on a group from the Guajajara tribe on a highway in Maranhão state, killing two and wounding others

Agencies

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A Guajajara 'forest guardian' in Maranhão state, where two indigenous men were shot dead on Saturday. Photograph: Ueslei Marcelino/Reuters

Two indigenous leaders have been shot dead and two others wounded in Brazil's Maranhão state, in an attack not far from where a prominent tribesman who defended the Amazon rainforest **was killed last month**, authorities said.

The attack on the members of the Guajajara tribe, which is known for the forest guardians who protect their territory against illegal deforestation, occurred on the margins of a federal highway near El-Betel village in the country's north-east on Saturday.

The group was returning from a meeting when they were attacked by gunmen in a moving car. Indigenous tribes in Brazil are facing escalating violence during the presidency of **Jair Bolsonaro**, who has promised to reduce tribal rights and encouraged the commercial exploitation of their protected lands. Tribes have faced violence from illegal loggers and miners.

Magno Guajajara, a spokesman for the tribe, said they did not know why the two men, who he identified as Firmino Guajajara and Raimundo Guajajara, had been shot. He said the attackers had lowered their car's windows and opened fire on the group.

"They were shooting at everyone," he said.

Authorities said they were investigating but did not say if anyone had been detained.

The incident happened in the Cana Brava indigenous reservation, which spans 137,000 hectares in the state of Maranhão and has 4,500 inhabitants, according to government records.

Paulo Paulino Guajajara, the "forest guardian" killed last month, was shot in a confrontation with illegal loggers not far from the site of Saturday's attack.

The incident comes during the UN's two-week international climate change conference in Madrid, where Brazilian indigenous leaders are present and attempting to draw attention to the importance of protecting their forest territories.

"How long will this go on? Who will be next?" Sonia Guajajara, coordinator of a network to connect Brazilian indigenous peoples, said in a phone interview from Madrid. "The authorities need to look at our indigenous people. They're taking away our lives."

Brazil's federal police are investigating the killing in El-Betel and its motivation, the justice minister, Sergio Moro, said on social media. Moro also said he is evaluating the possibility of dispatching a National Guard team to the state.

The advocacy group Amazon Watch said the Guajajara people were returning from a meeting with Eletronorte, a Brazilian electric utilities company, and Funai (Brazilian National Indigenous Foundation) where they had been advocating for their rights.

The program director of Amazon Watch, Christian Poirier, said: "An institutionalised genocide of indigenous peoples is taking place in **Brazil**. They are being left alone, vulnerable to all kinds of threats and violence.

"The international community must not accept that any more indigenous blood be shed. It is the constitutional duty of the Brazilian government to protect indigenous territories and ensure the safety of their peoples."

Indigenous boy, 15, murdered on Brazil's Amazon border

Erisvan Soares Guajajara's body was found with knife wounds in Maranhão region

Dom Phillips in Rio de Janeiro

Sat 14 Dec 2019 00:25 GMT

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Aerial view of Arariboia, Maranhao state, Brazil. The murder of Erisvan Soares Guajajara, is the fourth from the Guajajara tribe in recent weeks. Photograph: Marizilda Cruppe/AFP/Getty Images

A 15-year-old indigenous boy has been murdered in **Brazil** on the edge of a heavily-deforested indigenous reserve in the state of Maranhão, on the fringes of the Amazon.

The murder, the fourth from the Guajajara tribe in recent weeks, came as a wave of racist abuse against indigenous people swept social media in the state.

The Indigenous Missionary Council (CIMI), a non-profit group **reported** that Erisvan Soares Guajajara's body was found with knife wounds on Friday in Amarante do Maranhão. The group said he had travelled to the town, on the edge of the Araribóia indigenous reserve, with his father. The G1 news site **reported** that a non-indigenous man called Roberto Silva, 31, was also killed with Erisvan and that both died in the early hours of Friday at a party in an area called Vila Industrial.

"Another brutal crime against the Guajajara people," **tweeted** Sonia Guajajara, a leader from the same tribe and reserve who is executive coordinator of Brazilian indigenous association ABIP. "Everyone who doesn't like us feels allowed to kill because they know impunity rules. It's time to say ENOUGH."

Murders of indigenous people soared 23% in 2018, **according** to CIMI figures, and land invasions have risen since far-right president Jair Bolsonaro took office in January. He has compared indigenous people living on reserves to "prehistoric men" and said their lands should be developed.

In a statement, the state government of Maranhão said preliminary investigations indicated "the crime was not motivated by hate, land disputes or deforestation in indigenous reserves". Brazil's indigenous agency Funai said it was following the case.

Erisvan lived in the Araribóia indigenous reserve, which has been decimated by loggers. A group of Guajajara forest **guardians** expelled loggers from the reserve.

but have faced threats and violent attacks. In November, guardian Paulo Paulino Guajajara was **killed** by loggers in an ambush and another, Laércio Guajajara, was shot and injured.

Loggers in illegal vehicles operate openly around Amarante yet police rarely intervene. "There is a lot of racism against indigenous in Amarante," said Gilderlan Rodrigues, CIMI's Maranhão coordinator. The group said Erisvan's family refuted comments by local police linking the killings to the drug trade.

Last Saturday, two Guajajara leaders – Firmino Silvino Guajajara and Raimundo Bernice Guajajara – were shot and killed in a drive-by **shooting** on a highway in the nearby Cana Brava indigenous reserve in the same state. Two others were injured.

The men were returning from a meeting when a group of men in a white car opened fire. A Funai **official** said the killing could have been related to frequent robberies on the highway which crosses the reserve but Maranhão's human rights society **blamed** rising prejudice.

Since then a wave of racist abuse has swept social media in the region. "Those who fired should have killed at least 50," said one local on a WhatsApp group. "The government should throw a bomb and exterminate these disgraceful indigenous," said another.

"These are common people ... inciting crimes against indigenous people," said Érika Nogueira, the director of the Ascalwa indigenous association. "That is what is most worrying, it is civil society."

Brazilian 'forest guardian' killed by illegal loggers in ambush

Paulo Paulino Guajajara was killed by armed loggers in the Araribóia region in Maranhão

Sam Cowie São Paulo

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Paulo Paulino was a member of Guardians of the Forest, formed to ward off illegal logging gangs. Photograph: Ueslei Marcelino/Reuters

A Brazilian indigenous land defender has been killed in an ambush by illegal loggers in an Amazon frontier region.

According to a statement by the Brazilian Indigenous Peoples Association, Paulo Paulino Guajajara was shot and killed inside the Araribóia indigenous territory in Maranhão state. Another tribesman, Laércio Guajajara, was also shot and hospitalised and a logger has been reported missing. No body has yet been recovered.

Sérgio Moro, the justice minister of far-right president Jair Bolsonaro's government, confirmed that Brazil's federal police were investigating the killing. "We will spare no effort to bring those responsible for this serious crime to justice," he [tweeted](#).

The tribesmen are members of an indigenous forest guard called Guardians of the Forest, which formed in 2012 to ward off logging gangs pillaging their rare, hardwood-rich reserve.

Their work involves armed patrols and destroying logging encampments and has earned them dangerous enemies. Several Guardians in Maranhão [have been killed in recent years](#), including three from Araribóia.



Paulo Paulino Guajajara holds a gun during the search for illegal loggers on Araribóia indigenous land near the city of Amarante, Brazil. Photograph: Ueslei Marcelino/Reuters

According to Gilderlan Rodrigues, Maranhão regional coordinator of Brazil's indigenous missionary council, the murdered tribesman had been threatened several times. "Their work bothers those that want to loot their territory," he said, adding that the killers were from a nearby rural settlement and had entered the reserve without permission. "These criminal actions must be combated so that more lives are not lost."

The 4,130 sq km (1,595 sq miles) Araribóia indigenous reserve is home to an estimated 5,300 indigenous Brazilians of the Guajajara tribe and the Awá, an isolated group described as [the "world's most endangered tribe"](#). It concentrates much of the last remaining Amazon rainforest in Maranhão state.

Sarah Shenker, senior research and advocacy officer at [Survival International](#), who knew the murdered tribesman, described it as an "island of green amid a sea of deforestation". She said the killing was "a crime foretold".

Earlier this year Paulino told Survival International: "It makes me so mad to see this [forest destruction]. These people think they can come here, into our home, and help themselves to our forest? No. We won't allow it. We don't break into their houses and rob them, do we? My blood is boiling. I'm so angry."

The reserve is officially protected by the Brazilian government but is constantly targeted by logging gangs and has long been a hotbed of violent conflict. In 2015, a former enforcement operations coordinator with Brazil's environmental agency Ibama, Roberto Cabral, was shot there.

In June this year, the Araribóia Guardians' leader, Olímpio Guajajara, recorded a video calling for help from the Brazilian state after reporting that gunmen were being paid to kill them and indigenous houses had been shot at.

"We don't want war, we want to resist," he said. "We want the Brazilian authorities to help protect the lives of the Guardians that are threatened." The video was sent to the Brazilian government.

Few land conflict-related killings in [Brazil](#) result in convictions, which advocates say has produced a culture of impunity. According to Brazil's pastoral land commission, a rural violence watchdog, of 157 land conflict killings in Maranhão state between 1985 and 2017, just five cases went to

court.

Since the beginning of this year, when Bolsonaro took office, observers noted that **attacks and invasions of indigenous lands had soared in Brazil** as environmental and indigenous protection agencies suffered cuts and interference.

“The indigenous genocide of Brazil is legitimised by the discourse of the president,” said indigenous leader Sonia Bone Guajajara, who is from the Araribóia reserve and is currently in Europe with the campaign **Indigenous Blood: Not a Single Drop More**.