Amazon Fires
August 2019
Reports from diverse News and Scientific Sources
Amazon fires: Brazil threatened over EU trade deal
4 hours ago

Members of Brazil's indigenous Mura tribe vow to defend their land.

France and Ireland say they will not ratify a huge trade deal with South American nations unless Brazil does more to fight fires in the Amazon.

French leader Emmanuel Macron said President Jair Bolsonaro had lied to him about his stance on climate change. There are currently a record number of fires in the Amazon rainforest - a major source of oxygen for the world. Environmental groups say the fires are linked to Mr Bolsonaro's policies, which he denies.

European leaders have also expressed dismay over the fires, with UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson calling them "not only heartbreaking but an international crisis." "We stand ready to provide whatever help we can to bring them under control and help protect one of Earth's greatest wonders," he added.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel has called the fire an "acute emergency... shocking and threatening not only for Brazil and the other affected countries, but also for the whole world".

Mr Bolsonaro said on Friday that he was considering options for fighting the fires, including deploying the military. However, he has also accused Mr Macron of meddling for "political gain", and previously said calls to discuss the fires at this weekend's G7 summit in Biarritz, France - which Brazil is not participating in - showed "a misplaced colonialist mindset".

How significant is the trade deal?
Very - the EU-Mercosur trade deal has been described as the EU's biggest deal to date. It took 20 years of negotiations to strike the agreement with the South American bloc, consisting of Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay.

The EU is Mercosur's second biggest partner in trade in goods, accounting for 20.1% of the total in 2018. By contrast, EU exports to Mercosur accounted for 2.3% of the EU's total exports in 2018.

The trade includes food and beverages, tobacco and farm products from the South American side and machinery, chemicals and pharmaceutical products from the EU.

Will international pressure work?
Analysis by Daniel Gallas, BBC News, São Paulo

Mr Bolsonaro is often called the "Trump of the Tropics" because of his unpredictable and brash manners. So it is anyone's guess whether he will back down or carry on with this stance.

Back in June, he hailed the Mercosur-EU trade deal as "historic" and "one of the most important trade deals of all time". But even Mr Bolsonaro's agriculture minister and the country's farmers associations have suggested there needs to be a change of tone from the president.

Meanwhile, Finland's finance minister has called on the EU to consider banning Brazilian beef imports. Finland is currently president of the Council of the EU - a role which is rotated among member states every six months.
Environmental groups have called for protests in cities across Brazil on Friday to demand action to combat the fires. Hundreds of protesters also gathered outside the Brazilian embassies around the world, including in London, Berlin, Mumbai and Paris. “We can’t stand around waiting for the sky to turn black all the way here in London too,” protester Laura Villares House, 33, told BBC Brasil.

Why does the Amazon matter?
The largest rainforest in the world, the Amazon is a vital carbon store that slows down the pace of global warming. It is known as the “lungs of the world” and is home to about three million species of plants and animals, and one million indigenous people.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres tweeted on Thursday: “In the midst of the global climate crisis, we cannot afford more damage to a major source of oxygen and biodiversity. The Amazon must be protected.”

How bad are the fires and who is responsible for them?
Satellite data published by the National Institute for Space Research (Inpe) has shown an increase of 85% this year in fires across Brazil, most of them in the Amazon region. Mr Bolsonaro has brushed off the latest data, arguing that it was the season of the “queimada”, when farmers burn land to clear it before planting. However, Inpe has noted that the number of fires is not in line with those normally reported during the dry season. Wildfires often occur in the dry season in Brazil but they are also deliberately started in efforts to illegally deforest land for cattle ranching.
Conservationists say Mr Bolsonaro has encouraged loggers and farmers to clear the land. During his campaign, he pledged to limit fines for damaging the rainforest and to weaken the influence of the environmental agency. Mr Bolsonaro has suggested that non-governmental organisations (NGOs) started the fires, but admitted he had no evidence for this claim. In comments on Thursday, he acknowledged that farmers might be involved in setting fires in the region, according to Reuters news agency.

US space agency Nasa, meanwhile, has said that overall fire activity across the Amazon basin this year has been close to the average compared to the past 15 years.

G7 leaders to hold emergency talks over Amazon wildfires crisis

Brazil’s handling of fires to top agenda in Biarritz as France and Ireland threaten to block trade deal

Amazon fires: what is happening and is there anything we can do?

Julian Borger in Biarritz, Jonathan Watts, and Tom Phillips in Mexico City

Fri 23 Aug 2019 18.27 BST

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Leaders of the world’s major democracies are due to hold emergency talks this weekend on the wildfires engulfing the Amazon, as
international efforts to force Brazil to change its deforestation policies gathered momentum.

As heads of state and government were due to arrive at the G7 in Biarritz on Saturday, France and Ireland threatened to block the Mercosur free-trade agreement between the EU and South American nations if the government of Jair Bolsonaro does not stop the deforestation of the Amazon, which experts say has fuelled the fires. Other EU members were under pressure to walk away from the Mercosur (Southern Common Market) deal, which is already unpopular among European farmers.

The Irish taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, who was first to call the Mercosur deal into question on Friday, said Bolsonaro’s attempt to blame the fires on environmental groups was “Orwellian”.

The Finnish government, which currently chairs the EU, called on member states to consider more trade restrictions. The country’s finance minister, Mika Lintila, said he “condemns the destruction of the Amazon and calls for Finland and the EU to urgently look into the possibility of banning Brazilian beef imports”.

The Amazon is burning because the world eats so much meat

By Eliza Mackintosh, CNN

Updated 1542 GMT (2342 HKT) August 23, 2019

(CNN) While the wildfires raging in the Amazon rainforest may constitute an “international crisis,” they are hardly an accident.

The vast majority of the fires have been set by loggers and ranchers to clear land for cattle. The practice is on the rise, encouraged by Jair Bolsonaro, Brazil’s populist pro-business president, who is backed by the country’s so-called “beef caucus.”

While this may be business as usual for Brazil’s beef farmers, the rest of the world is looking on in horror.

So, for those wondering how they could help save the rainforest, known as “the planet’s lungs” for producing about 20% of the world’s oxygen, the answer may be simple. Eat less meat.

It’s an idea that Finland has already floated. On Friday, the Nordic country’s finance minister called for the European Union to “urgently review the possibility of banning Brazilian beef imports” over the Amazon fires.
Brazil is the world’s largest exporter of beef, providing close to 20% of the total global exports, according to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) -- a figure that could rise in the coming years.

Last year the country shipped 1.64 million tonnes of beef -- the highest volume in history -- generating $6.57 billion in revenue, according to the Brazilian Beef Exporters Association (Abiec), an association of more than 30 Brazilian meat-packing companies.

The growth of Brazil’s beef industry has been driven in part by strong demand from Asia -- mostly China and Hong Kong. These two markets alone accounted for nearly 44% of all beef exports from Brazil in 2018, according to the USDA.

And a trade deal struck in June between South America’s Mercosur bloc of countries and the European Union could open up even more markets for Brazil’s beef-packing industry.

Speaking after the agreement as announced, the head of Abiec, Antônio Camardelli, said the pact could help Brazil gain access to prospective new markets, like Indonesia and Thailand, while boosting sales with existing partners, like the EU.

“A deal of this magnitude is like an invitation card for speaking with other countries and trade blocs,” Camardelli told Reuters in July.

Once implemented, the deal will lift a 20% levy on beef imports into the EU.

But, on Friday, Ireland said it was ready to block the deal unless Brazil took action on the Amazon.

In a statement Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar described as “Orewellian” Bolsonaro’s attempt to blame the fires on environmental groups. Varadkar said that Ireland will monitor Brazil’s environmental actions to determine whether to block the Mercosur deal, which is two years away.

He added Irish and European farmers could not be told to use fewer pesticides and respect biodiversity when trade deals were being made with countries not subjected to “decent environmental, labor and product standards.”

In June, before the furor over the rainforest began, the Irish Farmers Association called on Ireland not to ratify the deal, arguing its terms would disadvantage European beef farmers.

Deal or no deal, Brazil’s beef industry is projected to continue expanding, buoyed by natural resources, grassland
availability and global demand, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).
And, with that growth, comes steep environmental costs.
Brazil's space research center (INPE) said this week that the number of fires in Brazil is 80% higher than last year. More than half are in the Amazon region, spelling disaster for the local environment and ecology.
Alberto Setzer, a senior scientist at INPE, told CNN that the burning can range from a small-scale agricultural practice, to new deforestation for mechanized and modern agribusiness projects.
Farmers wait until the dry season to start burning and clearing areas so their cattle can graze, but this year’s destruction has been described as unprecedented. Environmental campaigners blame this uptick on Bolsonaro, who they say has encouraged ranchers, farmers, and loggers to exploit and burn the rainforest like never before with a sense of impunity.

Brush fires burn in the Brazilian state of Mato Grosso on August 20.
Bolsonaro has dismissed accusations of responsibility for the fires, but a clear shift seems to be underway.
And if saving the rainforest isn’t enough to convince carnivores to stop eating Brazilian beef -- the greenhouse gas emissions the cattle create may be.
Beef is responsible for 41% of livestock greenhouse gas emissions, and that livestock accounts for 14.5% of total global emissions. And methane -- the greenhouse gas cattle produce from both ends -- is 25 times more potent that carbon dioxide.
An alarming report released last year by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report, said
changing our diets could contribute 20% of the effort needed to keep global temperatures from rising 2°C above pre-industrial levels. Namely, eating less meat.
Still, global consumption of beef and veal is set to rise in the next decade according to projections from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO).
A joint report predicted global production would increase 16% between 2017 and 2027 to meet demand.
The majority of that expansion will be in developing countries, like Brazil.
CNN's Arnaud Siad contributed to this report from London.
LONDON — European leaders have reacted with growing fear and anger to the fires ravaging Brazil’s rain forest, calling it a worldwide crisis that is accelerating global warming — and one that Brazil’s leader appears unwilling to combat.

President Emmanuel Macron of France went so far, on Friday, as to accuse President Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil of lying about being committed to fighting climate change and protecting the Amazon forest.

As a result, Mr. Macron said, he would try to kill a major trade deal between Europe and South America that has been years in the making.

Mr. Macron’s statement was an escalation in a series of sharp comments and accusations he has traded with Mr. Bolsonaro, an unusually harsh exchange between the leaders of two democracies.

The French president and Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany both said that the Amazon fires should be added to the agenda of the Group of 7 summit meeting being held this weekend, and that Mr. Bolsonaro
replied by telling them to keep their noses out of Brazil’s business.

The fires have prompted a widespread backlash against Brazil and its far-right president, who has cut back on protection of wild lands and wants to open more rain forest to farming and ranching.

Environmentalists and celebrities have called for a boycott of the country, and Germany and Norway have halted payments to a $1.2 billion Amazon conservation program after Mr. Bolsonaro’s government interfered with its leadership.

While many of the fires have been set by farmers on lands that were previously cleared, others were set by people clearing rain forest anew, for crops or pastures. The number of fires has increased sharply this year, and environmentalists say Mr. Bolsonaro’s government has enabled and even encouraged the destruction, which it denies.

Mr. Bolsonaro claimed this week that nongovernmental organizations had set fires to make his administration look bad, in retaliation for having their government grants cut, but conceded that he had no evidence for the accusation. He said that his country did not have the resources to fight the fires effectively.

The Amazon forests are an important global repository of carbon, and when trees are burned they release carbon dioxide, the primary greenhouse gas, into the atmosphere. In addition, deforestation threatens indigenous peoples and wildlife found only in that region.

On Thursday, Mr. Macron tweeted: “Our house is burning. Literally. The Amazon rain forest - the lungs which produces 20% of our planet’s oxygen - is on fire. It is an international crisis.”

He said the Group of 7 should take up the matter at its meeting, which begins Saturday in Biarritz, France.

Mr. Bolsonaro accused Mr. Macron of trying to use the issue “for personal political gain.” The idea of major powers discussing a Brazilian problem without including Brazil, which is not a Group of 7 member, “evokes a misplaced colonialist mind-set,” he wrote.
- Lamento que o presidente Macron busque instrumentalizar uma questão interna do Brasil e de outros países amazônicos p/ ganhos políticos pessoais. O tom sensacionalista com que se refere à Amazônia (apelando até p/ fotos falsas) não contribui em nada para a solução do problema.

But it soon became evident that Mr. Macron was not alone. The United Nations secretary general, António Guterres, said, “in the midst of the global climate crisis, we cannot afford more damage to a major source of oxygen and biodiversity.”

On Friday, Steffen Seibert, a spokesman for Ms. Merkel, said at a news media briefing that “the extent of the fires in the Amazon area is shocking and threatening, not only for Brazil and the other affected countries, but also for the whole world.”

Like Mr. Macron, he said, “the chancellor is convinced that this acute emergency” should be on the Group of 7 agenda.

Amazon rainforest fires: Macron calls for 'international crisis' to lead G7 discussions

France's president, Emmanuel Macron, has said the fires in the Amazon are an “international crisis” and called for them to be top of the agenda at the G7 summit, prompting a furious response from Brazil's leader.

“Our house is burning. Literally,” Macron tweeted, adding that the Amazon produced 20% of the world's oxygen.
Our house is burning. Literally. The Amazon rain forest - the lungs which produces 20% of our planet’s oxygen - is on fire. It is an international crisis. Members of the G7 Summit, let’s discuss this emergency first order in two days! #ActForTheAmazon

Brazils’s president, Jair Bolsonaro, a right-wing nationalist who bristles at the idea of foreign interference in the Brazilian Amazon, took exception to his French counterpart’s comments.

“I regret that president Macron seeks to take advantage of what is a domestic Brazilian issue and of other Amazonian countries for personal political gain,” Bolsonaro tweeted, targeting what he called Macron’s “sensationalist tone”.

In a second tweet, he said: “The French president’s suggestion that Amazonian matters be discussed at the G7 without the involvement of countries of the region recalls the colonialist mindset that is unacceptable in the 21st century.”

Later Brazil’s foreign minister Ernesto Araújo weighed in with a thread on Twitter, condemning the “savage and unfair” international campaign against his nation.

Araújo claimed the campaign was being waged “because President Bolsonaro’s government is rebuilding Brazil.”

“The ‘environmental crisis’ appears to be the last weapon left in the arsenal of leftist lies to smother this fact,” he added.

Earlier one of Bolsonaro’s top foreign advisers also tweeted a reprimand to foreign meddlers. “God
does not like liars,” Filipe Martins wrote in a series of posts rebutting international criticism.

Bolsonaro’s politician son, Eduardo, continued the offensive, tweeting a YouTube video called “Macron is an idiot” to his 1.6m followers.

But international concern continued to be expressed over the scale of the fires. The UN secretary general, Antonio Guterres, said he was “deeply concerned” about their effect on the global climate crisis: “In the midst of the global climate crisis, we cannot afford more damage to a major source of oxygen and biodiversity.”

London’s mayor, Sadiq Khan, said the fires were being “aided and abetted by the Brazilian government”. The burning of the rainforest was “an act of shocking environmental vandalism with global consequences”.

Celebrities, including Madonna, also weighed in on Thursday. “The Fires Are Raging and The Amazonia continues to burn,” she tweeted.

The Fires Are Raging and The Amazonia continues to burn........This is a devastation to Brazil—to the indigenous people who live there and the-plant and animal species that make this the most important bio-diverse Forest!!! President Bolsonaro please...
https://www.instagram.com/p/B1emtcjhSz4/
“It is devastating to see our world suffer,” the British Formula One champion Lewis Hamilton wrote on Instagram.

The footballer Cristiano Ronaldo tweeted about the urgency of the Amazon fires, saying it’s “our responsibility to help save the planet”.

The Amazon Rainforest produces more than 20% of the world’s oxygen and it's been burning for the past 3 weeks. It’s our responsibility to help to save our planet. #prayforamazonia

Brazil has had more than 72,000 fires this year, an 84% increase on the same period in 2018, says
the country’s National Institute for Space Research. More than half were in the Amazon.

There was a sharp rise in deforestation during July, which has been followed by extensive burning in August. Local newspapers say farmers in some regions are organising “fire days” to take advantage of weaker enforcement by the authorities.

Ecuador’s president, Lenín Moreno, on Thursday said he had spoken to Bolsonaro and would send three “brigades of specialists in forest fires and environmental research, who will help mitigate the tragedy in the Amazon rainforest.”

Amazon fires: Brazil sends army to help tackle blazes

1 hour ago

Brazil's president has ordered the armed forces to help fight a record number of forest fires in the Amazon.

A decree issued by President Jair Bolsonaro authorises the deployment of soldiers in nature reserves, indigenous lands and border areas in the region.

The announcement comes after intense pressure from European leaders.

France and Ireland say they will not ratify a huge trade deal with South American nations unless Brazil does more to tackle blazes in the Amazon.

Finland’s finance minister has also called on the EU to consider banning Brazilian beef imports.

Finland is currently president of the Council of the EU - a role which is rotated among member states every six months.

Environmental groups called for protests in cities across Brazil on Friday to demand action to combat the fires.

Hundreds of protesters also gathered outside the Brazilian embassies around the world, including in London, Berlin, Mumbai and Paris.
“We can’t stand around waiting for the sky to turn black all the way here in London too,” protester Laura Viliares House, 33, told BBC Brasil.

What does the decree say?
The decree is fairly vague in its wording, but specifies that the military will be deployed to nature reserves, indigenous lands and border areas in the region.
The deployment of soldiers will be left down to regional governors who can request “preventive action … against environmental crimes” and ask the army to “survey and combat fire outbreaks”.
Defence Minister Fernando Azevedo e Silva is to oversee the order and will be responsible for allocating resources, it states.
The order is initially authorises action for a month, from 24 August to 24 September.

Brazil Plans to Mobilize the Military to Fight Fires in the Amazon

President Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil during a ceremony at Army headquarters Friday in Brasilia.

Enildo Peres/Associated Press
RIO DE JANEIRO — Facing global scorn over environmental policies that have contributed to a rash of fires in the Amazon, President Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil said Friday that he was planning to send the military to contain the blazes.

After being largely dismissive about the fires earlier in the week, and claiming without evidence that they were probably set by environmental groups in an effort to undermine him, Mr. Bolsonaro’s administration appeared rattled on Friday.

“Whatever is within our power we will do,” Mr. Bolsonaro told reporters on Friday after a late-night emergency cabinet meeting on Thursday. “The problem is resources.”

[As fires have spread, so have misleading photos.]

Mr. Bolsonaro did not indicate what resources the military would bring to bear, but he is scheduled to give a televised address Friday evening to describe the government’s response plan.

Global outrage over the fires has spurred calls to boycott Brazilian products and led European leaders to threaten to walk away from a trade agreement that the European Union struck with Brazil and a handful of neighboring countries in June.

Forest fires happen every year in Brazil this time of year, when temperatures and humidity are lower. But the number of fires identified by satellite images in the Amazon so far this month is the highest since 2010, according to Brazil’s National Institute of Space Research agency, which tracks deforestation and forest fires using satellite images.

The number of fires identified by the agency in the Amazon region so far this year, 40,341, is roughly 35 percent higher than the average for the first eight months of each year since 2010.
The decade before that included several years in which the number of fires identified during the first eight months was far higher. For instance, in 2005, there were more than 94,700 fires recorded. The rate of deforestation during that era prompted Brazil to adopt an ambitious set of policies to preserve the Amazon and other environmentally sensitive areas.

Many of those protections have eroded on Mr. Bolsonaro’s watch.

Brazilian officials sought to diminish the severity of the crisis and pushed back on the dire characterization of some world leaders, most notably President Emmanuel Macron of France, who wrote on Twitter on Thursday: “Our house is burning. Literally.”

Brazil’s minister of agriculture, Tereza Cristina Corrêa da Costa Dias, told reporters on Friday that many observers were conflating slash-and-burn fires regularly used in farmland with out-of-control forest fires.

Foreign governments that threaten to punish Brazil on trade or exports, she said, “first need to know what is happening in Brazil before taking any measure.”

Ms. Corrêa called on foreign governments to “lower the temperature,” adding that “Brazil understands the importance of the Amazon.”

Some local officials expressed greater alarm, though. In the northern state of Acre, the governor declared a state of emergency and ordered the evacuation of areas that could become engulfed by fires.

“We have alarming data on air quality, so health officials have increased the number of doctors available to treat our people,” Israel Milani, the state’s top environmental official, said in an interview.

In the state of Rondônia, firefighters said they were in triage mode.

“It’s impossible to be everywhere at the same time,” said Coronel Demargli Farias, the state’s chief of firefighters. “Even if we had 50,000 men.”

Ernesto Londoño and Manuela Andreoni reported from Rio de Janeiro, and Letícia Casado from Brasília.

Video

Amazon Rainforest Fires: Here’s What’s Really Happening
The rain forest, critical to absorbing the planet’s carbon dioxide, has seen an increase in deforestation under Brazil’s president, Jair Bolsonaro.

Credit
Ueslei Marcelino/Reuters

By Alexandria Symonds
Aug. 23, 2019
Updated 3:47 p.m. ET

The hashtag #PrayForAmazonas was the top trending topic in the world on Twitter on Wednesday, as images of a rain forest on fire spread across the internet. Here is what we know so far about the fires raging in the Amazon.

How widespread are the fires in the Amazon?

The number of fires identified by satellite images in the Amazon so far this month is the highest since 2010, according to Brazil’s National Institute of Space Research agency, which tracks deforestation and forest fires using satellite images.

The number of fires identified by the agency in the Amazon region so far this year, 40,341, is roughly 35 percent higher than the average for the first eight months of each year since 2010.
A fire in the Amazon rain forest on Tuesday near Porto Velho, Rondonia State, Brazil.

Credit
Ueslei Marcelino/Reuters

The decade before that included several years in which the number of fires identified during the first eight months was far higher.

[Read about Brazil’s retreat, under President Jair Bolsonaro, from its former efforts to slow global warming by preserving the Amazon.]

How did the fires start?

Natural fires in the Amazon are rare, and the majority of these fires were set by farmers preparing Amazon-adjacent farmland for next year’s crops and pasture.

Much of the land that is burning was not old-growth rain forest, but land that had already been cleared of trees and set for agricultural use.
A satellite image showing fires burning in the Brazilian states of Amazonas, upper left, Para upper right, Mato Grosso, lower right, and Rondonia, lower left, last week.

Credit
NASA

How unusual are the fires? How dangerous are they to the rain forest?

INPE’s figures represent a 79 percent increase in fires from the same period in 2018. There have been large numbers of fires in other recent years as well: According to a manager of Global Forest Watch, the number of fires in the Amazon this year is roughly comparable to 2016.

Deforestation more broadly is always a cause for concern. Last year, the world lost about 30 million acres of tree cover, including 8.9 million acres of primary rain forest, an area the size of Belgium, according to data from the University of Maryland.

Annual Deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon

By The New York Times | Source: Brazil’s National Institute for Space Research

The destruction of the Amazon rain forest in Brazil has increased rapidly since the nation’s new far-right president took over and his government scaled back efforts to fight illegal logging, ranching and mining.

While campaigning for president last year, Mr. Bolsonaro declared that Brazil’s vast protected lands were an obstacle to economic growth and promised to open them up to commercial exploitation.
Less than a year into his term, that is already happening.

Brazil’s part of the Amazon lost more than 1,330 square miles of forest cover in the first half of 2019, a 39 percent increase over the same period last year, according to the government agency that tracks deforestation. The Amazon is often referred to as the Earth’s “lungs,” because its vast forests release oxygen and store carbon dioxide, a heat-trapping gas that is a major cause of global warming. If enough rain forest is lost and can’t be restored, the area will become savanna, which doesn’t store as much carbon and would mean a reduction in the planet’s “lung capacity.”

[Read about the backlash against Brazil’s environmental policies, which have paved the way for runaway deforestation of the Amazon.]

Did climate change cause these fires, and how will they affect climate change?

These fires were not caused by climate change. They were, by and large, set by humans. However, climate change can make fires worse. Fires can burn hotter and spread more quickly under warmer and drier conditions.
When it comes to the future of climate change, widespread fires contribute a dual negative effect. Trees are valuable because they can store carbon dioxide, and that storage capacity is lost when trees burn. Burning trees also pumps more carbon into the atmosphere.

How does deforestation work? Is this different?

Deforestation can be caused by natural factors, like insects or blight, or by humans. This is a typical case of human deforestation: Farmers cut down trees to plant or expand a farm, then burn the leavings to clear the ground.

Brazil had previously tried to portray itself as a leader in protecting the Amazon and fighting global warming. Between 2004 and 2012, the country created new conservation areas, increased monitoring and took away government credits from rural producers who were caught razing protected areas. This brought deforestation to the lowest level since record-keeping began.

But as the economy plunged into a recession in 2014, the country became more reliant on the agricultural commodities it produces — beef and soy, which are drivers of deforestation — and on the powerful rural lobby. Land clearing, much of it illegal, began to tick upward again.
Are the fires the fault of President Jair Bolsonaro?

There is evidence that farmers feel more emboldened to burn land following the election of Mr. Bolsonaro. A New York Times analysis of public records found that enforcement actions intended to discourage illegal deforestation, such as fines or seizure of equipment, by Brazil’s main environmental agency fell by 20 percent during the first six months of this year.

Mr. Bolsonaro blames nongovernmental organizations for the fires. He has cited no evidence, and environmental experts dispute the claim.

What is Brazil’s government doing to fight the fires?

Some local governments have said they are shoring up their fire brigades. The federal government has not offered any major organized effort to fight the fires. On Thursday, Mr. Bolsonaro said the Brazilian government lacks the resources to fight the fires.

Ernesto Londoño, Manuela Andreoni, Henry Fountain and John Schwartz contributed reporting.

Amazon rainforest fires: Macron calls for 'international crisis' to lead G7 discussions

Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro lashes out at 'sensationalist' comments saying they were for 'personal political gain'

Tom Phillips, Latin America correspondent

Fri 23 Aug 2019 01:20 BST
Last modified on Fri 23 Aug 2019 04:03 BST
France’s president, Emmanuel Macron, has said the fires in the Amazon are an “international crisis” and called for them to be top of the agenda at the G7 summit, prompting a furious response from Brazil’s leader.

“Our house is burning. Literally,” Macron tweeted, adding that the Amazon produced 20% of the world’s oxygen.
Brazil’s president, Jair Bolsonaro, a right-wing nationalist who bristles at the idea of foreign interference in the Brazilian Amazon, took exception to his French counterpart’s comments.

“I regret that president Macron seeks to take advantage of what is a domestic Brazilian issue and of other Amazonian countries for personal political gain,” Bolsonaro tweeted, targeting what he called Macron’s “sensationalist tone”.

In a second tweet, he said: “The French president’s suggestion that Amazonian matters be discussed at the G7 without the involvement of countries of the region recalls the colonialist mindset that is unacceptable in the 21st century.”

Later Brazil’s foreign minister Ernesto Araújo weighed in with a thread on Twitter, condemning the “savage and unfair” international campaign against his nation.

Araújo claimed the campaign was being waged “because President Bolsonaro’s government is rebuilding Brazil.”

“The ‘environmental crisis’ appears to be the last weapon left in the arsenal of leftist lies to smother this fact,” he added.

Earlier one of Bolsonaro’s top foreign advisers also tweeted a reprimand to foreign meddlers. “God does not like liars,” Filipe Martins wrote in a series of posts rebutting international criticism.

Bolsonaro’s politician son, Eduardo, continued the offensive, tweeting a YouTube video called “Macron is an idiot” to his 1.6m followers.

But international concern continued to be expressed over the scale of the fires. The UN secretary general, Antonio Guterres, said he was “deeply concerned” about their effect on the global climate crisis: “In the midst of the global climate crisis, we cannot afford more damage to a major source of oxygen and biodiversity.”

London’s mayor, Sadiq Khan, said the fires were being “aided and abetted by the Brazilian government”. The burning of the rainforest was “an act of shocking environmental vandalism with global consequences”.

Celebrities, including Madonna, also weighed in on Thursday. “The Fires Are Raging and The Amazonia continues to burn,” she tweeted.

Madonna ✔ @Madonna

The Fires Are Raging and The Amazonia continues to burn........This is a devastation to Brazil—to the indigenous people who live there and the-plant and animal species that make this the most important bio-diverse Forest!!! President Bolsonaro please...

https://www.instagram.com/p/B1emtcjhSz4/
“It is devastating to see our world suffer,” the British Formula One champion Lewis Hamilton wrote on Instagram.

The footballer Cristiano Ronaldo tweeted about the urgency of the Amazon fires, saying it’s “our responsibility to help save the planet”.

The Amazon Rainforest produces more than 20% of the world’s oxygen and its been burning for the past 3 weeks. It's our responsibility to help to save our planet. #prayforamazonia

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the country’s National Institute for Space Research. More than half were in the Amazon. There was a sharp rise in deforestation during July, which has been followed by extensive burning in August. Local newspapers say farmers in some regions are organising “fire days” to take advantage of weaker enforcement by the authorities.

Ecuador's president, Lenín Moreno, on Thursday said he had spoken to Bolsonaro and would send three “brigades of specialists in forest fires and environmental research, who will help mitigate the tragedy in the Amazon rainforest.”

Fires are raging in the Amazon forest. Here's how you can help slow all rainforest loss

By Amy Chillag, CNN

Updated 2228 GMT (0628 HKT) August 22, 2019

(CNN) The Amazon, the largest rainforest in the world, roughly half the size of the United States, is key to the health of the entire planet. Its trees produce an estimated 20% of the world's oxygen, while putting an enormous amount of water into the atmosphere at a time when cities are drying up. The Amazon is sucking in carbon and greenhouse gases while slowing the rising temperatures. But it's now burning at a record rate -- with images from space showing the smoke covering much of Brazil.

It’s not the only major forest under assault. Nearly half of the world’s forests that stood when humans started farming are now gone, and each year an additional 32 million acres are destroyed, according to the nonprofit Rainforest Alliance. The biggest reason is expansion of agriculture into forested areas. In Brazil it’s cattle ranching, soy production and logging, according to Nigel Sizer, tropical forest ecologist and chief program officer with the Rainforest Alliance. "It is responsible for 80% to 90% of the loss of tropical forests around the world." Environmental groups say these activities can be slowed or done in a much more sustainable way.

*There has been a lot of analysis and satellite data that shows there is so much land already cleared - a lot abandoned or very poorly used and managed that we could use to grow food on," says Sizer. "We don't need to be clearing new forests to do this in Brazil."

Here's what you can do to help slow forest loss.

Help reforestation and slow deforestation
You can help reforest parts of the world through the Rainforest Trust and Rainforest Alliance. The Rainforest Trust allows you to restrict your donations to a specific project. The Rainforest Alliance says 100% of your donation will help stop deforestation in Brazil right now. They are working with local groups at the forefront of this fight. Part of the Alliance’s work strives to make Brazil’s current ranches and farms more productive.

The Arbor Day Foundation also has a program to help save tropical rain forests which provide habitat for some 50% of the world’s plants and animals.

You can donate to any of these nonprofits by clicking on the button above, or clicking here.
https://impact.publicgood.com/campaign/bbf421eb-c32f-4dc7-94ca-f4844c0ed730

Make sure products you buy are "rainforest safe"

Products featuring the *Rainforest Alliance Certified™* seal come from farms that passed audits and met standards for sustainability. Thousands of products have earned the seal -- including coffee, chocolate and bananas. If you’re buying tropical wood products, look for the label "Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)." That’s the major certification system for forest and paper products, according to Sizer. The nonprofit makes sure that the wood is not contributing to illegal logging and deforestation. You can also donate to the group. "Look out for that when you have that option," Sizer said.

Take steps to live sustainably

As major forests decrease in size, carbon and greenhouse gases have increased in the atmosphere. But you can help slow that trend. "Think about greenhouse gas emissions -- driving less, buy a more fuel efficient car," Sizer says. He also recommends adjusting your thermostats by just a couple of degrees. "It makes a huge difference and saves money as well."

You can also buy carbon offsets. "If you have to fly for work often -- you can buy these offsets by making a small contribution to an organization that is planting trees, sucking up carbon that’s being emitted when you fly. These things really add up."

About 20% of the Amazon has already been destroyed, and that’s what scares Sizer. "The newest science now says if we deforest, if there’s a clearing of more than about 30% to 40% of the Amazon rainforest, it will start to dry out. We’ll pass an irreversible tipping point."

**As Amazon Fires Spread, So Do the Misleading Photos**

The fires are real. But the photographs that celebrities and politicians are sharing? Well, it depends.
Fires in the Amazon increased sharply this year.
Rogerio Florentino/EPA, via Shutterstock

By Niraj Chokshi
Aug. 23, 2019
Updated 4:20 p.m. ET

The jarring photographs of flames tearing through the Amazon have captivated attention around the world, but they may not always be what they seem.

The fires have prompted global calls for a boycott of Brazil, whose far-right president has cut back on protection of wild lands, but many of the images widely shared online by politicians, celebrities and others depict events from different places and even eras.

Amazon Rainforest Fires: Here’s What’s Really Happening
Aug. 23, 2019

Take the Portuguese soccer star Cristiano Ronaldo, who on Thursday shared one such image with his 120 million Facebook followers and nearly 80 million Twitter followers, adding, "It’s our responsibility to help to save our planet.”

The photo he shared showed a dramatic view of a glowing strip of flames and smoke, but it was actually taken in 2013, in a part of Brazil far from the Amazon, according to a caption posted alongside the photo by The Baltimore Sun at the time.

Cristiano Ronaldo
@Cristiano

The Amazon Rainforest produces more than 20% of the world’s oxygen and its been burning for the past 3 weeks. It’s our responsibility to help to save our planet. #prayforamazonia
On Wednesday, the musician Jaden Smith shared a different photo on Instagram with his 13 million followers that showed an aerial view of a snaking fire consuming what appeared to be a forest, noting, accurately and in all caps, that the Amazon is one of the world’s biggest carbon sinks.

What his post didn’t make clear is that the photo appeared to be three decades old, which is so old, in fact, that it was taken at a time when his father, Will Smith, was still starring in “The Fresh View More on Instagram

That photo, also shared by the tennis star Novak Djokovic, with his nearly nine million Twitter followers, and by Madonna, with her 14 million Instagram followers, appears to have been taken in 1989 in Brazil, according to a caption that appeared alongside the photo in a 2007 piece published by The Guardian, as Mother Jones and others have reported.

The same day that Jaden Smith shared that image, Leonardo DiCaprio shared another with his 34 million followers that showed a verdant thicket of trees engulfed in smoke. The singer Ricky Martin and President Emmanuel Macron of France also shared that image, but none identified its source.
Terrifying to think that the Amazon is the largest rain forest on the planet, creating 20% of the earth’s oxygen, basically the lungs of the world, has been on fire and burning for the last 16 days running, with literally NO media coverage whatsoever! Why?

That image [appears in a stock photo catalog](https://www.adobe.com), which credits it to the photographer Loren McIntyre, an explorer and photojournalist [who died in 2003](https://www gönderilend.com).

On Thursday afternoon, President Sebastián Piñera of Chile shared yet another photo of a smoke-filled canopy, but that one, too, was taken years ago. According to a [caption found in the Adobe stock photo catalog](https://www.adobe.com), it was captured in 2013 by a photographer for Reuters.

Los incendios forestales en #Amazonas son graves, afectan los pulmones de nuestro planeta y ponen en riesgo la salud de sus habitantes. Hoy conversé con Presidentes de Brasil @jairBolsonaro y Bolivia @Evoespueblo y les ofrecí la ayuda de Chile para combatir los incendios.

There are other examples of photos misleadingly used to raise awareness. Some feature an elephant, which is not native to the Americas, in apparent distress, its back feet in flames.
Others showcase a mother monkey, her head titled skyward and her mouth agape as she holds a limp baby. That photo was taken in India a few years ago, according to The Telegraph — the baby, which had just tripped, was soon back on its feet, the photographer told the publication.
Protesters have laid siege to Brazilian embassies around the world as international outrage over Jair Bolsonaro’s failure to protect the Amazon intensified and supporters maligned critics of the Brazilian president as leftist conspirators.

Hundreds of demonstrators gathered outside Brazil’s embassy in central London on Friday with placards reading: “The planet deserves better” and “Our house is on fire”.

“Bolsonaro wants to destroy the forest ... and we do not want this,” one indigenous leader from Brazil told the crowd.
There were also rallies outside Brazil’s embassies in Mexico City and Paris, where demonstrators reportedly carried banners reading: “Fora Bolsonaro!” or “Bolsonaro, out!”

Protesters also surrounded the Brazilian consulate in Geneva while further marches were planned in cities including Adelaide, Lisbon, Stockholm, Boston and Florida.

Brazil’s far-right president has rejected the international outcry over the fires raging in the Amazon and his stance on the environment.

Bolsonaro on Thursday painted the barrage of criticism as part of a foreign conspiracy that might eventually be used to justify a foreign “intervention” in the Amazon.

“This happens all over the world, it’s not just in Brazil,” he said of the fires decimating the world’s largest tropical rainforest.

Bolsonaro’s politician son, Eduardo, claimed criticism of his father was part of an international intrigue designed to damage his government.

“The GLOBAL left has come together in a clear attack against president Jair Bolsonaro,” he tweeted.

Rômulo Batista, a Greenpeace campaigner in the Amazon, said such claims – and Bolsonaro’s baseless insinuation that NGOs were behind the fires – were merely an attempt to deflect from Bolsonaro’s own responsibility for the environment calamity. “He is trying to hide behind a smokescreen,” Batista said.

In Brazil, demonstrators were preparing to mobilize for a weekend of protests in cities including Rio de Janeiro, Salvador, Curitiba, Recife and the Amazon city of Manaus.
“Almost everyone I know will go,” said Frederico Svoboda, 18, a history student from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro.

“I believe that if there is not international pressure to force the government to deal with the fires and guarantee the protection of biodiversity and indigenous peoples there could be climate disasters in Brazil and maybe South America.”

People around the world should “pressure the Brazilian government to act”, Svoboda added.

Anna Mello, a 24-year-old biologist, said she would march in the north-eastern city of Recife.

“For me this is surreal, I can’t believe it is happening. It is absurd that ... people can support this as if it were totally normal rather than a crime and something that might affect the whole of humanity.”

Writing in the O Globo newspaper, the columnist Bernando Mello Franco said that thanks to Bolsonaro, “Brazil is on track to go back to being seen as an environmental pariah”.
Climate activists from numerous cities have been protesting...
Demonstrators picketed numerous Brazilian embassies...
Demonstrators picketed numerous Brazilian embassies...
criticising Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro.
VIVA LA AMAZONIA
FUEGO AL CAPITAL!!
Amazon fires: what is happening and is there anything we can do?

Amazon rainforest

Why people should be worried about the blazes and increased deforestation in Brazil

Jonathan Watts
@jonathanwatts
Fri 23 Aug 2019 16.33 BST
What is happening in the Amazon?
Thousands of fires are burning in Brazil, many of them in the world’s biggest rainforest, which is sending clouds of smoke across the region and pumping alarming quantities of carbon into the world’s atmosphere.

Does this happen every year?
Yes, but some areas have suffered far more than usual. In the worst-affected Brazilian state of Amazonas, the peak day this month was 700% higher than the average for the same date over the past 15 years. In other states, the amount of ash and other particulates in August has hit the highest level since 2010.
What is the cause?
Most of the fires are agricultural, either smallholders burning stubble after harvest, or farmers clearing forest for cropland. Illegal land-grabbers also destroy trees so they can raise the value of the property they seize. But they are manmade and mostly deliberate. Unlike the huge recent blazes in Siberia and Alaska, the Amazon fires are very
unlikely to have been caused by lightning.

Is the entire forest ablaze?
No. Satellite monitoring experts say the images of an entire forest ablaze are exaggerated. A great deal of misinformation has been spread by social media, including the use of striking images from previous years’ burning seasons. This week, there are more large fires in Colombia and eastern Brazil than in the Amazon. Most of the agricultural burn-offs are in deforested areas. But there are also fires in protected reserves.

Do we need to worry about oxygen?
No. Although some reports have claimed the Amazon produces 20% of the world’s oxygen, it is not clear where this figure originated. The true figure is likely to be no more than 6%, according to climate scientists such as Michael Mann and Jonathan Foley. Even if it were accurate, the crops being planted in the cleared forest areas would also produce oxygen – quite likely at higher levels. So although the burning of the rainforest is worrying for many reasons, there is no need to worry about an oxygen shortage.

So should we still be concerned?
Extremely. The fires are mostly illegal and they are degrading the world’s biggest terrestrial carbon sink and most important home for biodiversity. They also contribute to a more important trend, which is an alarming rise in deforestation. Scientists say the Amazon is approaching a tipping point, after which it will irreversibly degrade into a dry savannah. At a time when the world needs billions more trees to absorb carbon and stabilise the climate, the planet is losing its biggest rainforest.

How much forest is being lost?
In July, deforestation spiked to a level not seen in more than a decade. According to preliminary satellite data from
Brazil’s space agency, trees were being cleared at the rate of five football pitches every minute. Over the single month, 2,254 sq km (870 sq miles) were lost, a rise of 278% on the same month last year. Scientists say this year could be the first for 10 years in which 10,000 sq km of Amazon are lost.

The situation was far worse in the 1990s and early 2000s. But Brazil won international kudos after that by slowing deforestation by 80% between 2005 and 2014. This was done with strict monitoring, better policing and stiffer penalties. But that system has been eroded in recent years and many fear a return to the alarming levels of forest loss that occurred two decades ago.

Is this the fault of the Brazilian president? Jair Bolsonaro has made things a lot worse by weakening the environment agency, attacking conservation NGOs and
promoting the opening of the Amazon to mining, farming and logging. The far-right leader has dismissed satellite data on deforestation and fired the head of the space agency. But it is not solely his fault. The agricultural lobby is powerful in Brazil and it has steadily eroded the protection system that was so successful from 2005-2014. Deforestation crept up in the past five years under the previous presidents Dilma Rousseff and Michel Temer. The rate has accelerated rapidly in the first eight months of Bolsonaro’s rule. But this is not just about him, politics or Brazil. There are also huge fires in Bolivia, which has a leftwing populist president.
In July 2019 73 sq km of the Amazon rainforest was cleared every day. For scale, that is an area of London that stretches from Hyde Park to Tower Bridge.
What is the outside world doing?
The UN secretary general and many world leaders and celebrities have expressed concern. The Amazon will be high on the agenda for G7 leaders at a summit in France this weekend. They are likely to make a strong statement condemning the recent increase in deforestation and urge Brazil to restore the Amazon protections that previously made the country a global environmental leader.

Is that enough?
No. The priority should be building a buffer against the tipping point and drawing down emissions, which means
not just protection of the Amazon but massive reforestation. This will require far more financial support than anything seen until now. For this to be effective, governments will also need to align their environment and trade policies. Currently countries like the UK spend small sums on overseas conservation, then promote billions of dollars worth of trade in beef, soy, timber, minerals and other products that undermine Amazon protection efforts. Politicians should also listen more to the voices of the people who live in the forest, such as indigenous groups and riverine communities.

**What can individuals do?**

The most important actions are political and collective. Join a party or campaign group that makes the Amazon a priority. Through these groups, urge your elected representatives to block trade deals with countries that destroy their forests and to provide more support for countries that expand tree cover.

Apart from this, donate to organisations that support the forest, forest dwellers and biodiversity, including *Instituto Socioambiental*, *Amazon Watch*, *WWF*, *Greenpeace*, *Imazon*, *International Rivers* and *Friends of the Earth*.

As consumers, think twice before buying Brazilian beef or other products unless certified by groups such as *Rainforest Alliance*. The Amazon connection is not always obvious.
The world wants to save the Amazon rainforest. Brazil’s Bolsonaro says hands off.

Smoke billows during a fire in an area of the Amazon rainforest near Porto Velho, Rondonia State, Brazil, on August 21, 2019. REUTERS/Uslei Marcelino

By Terrence McCoy and Marina Lopes

August 23 at 2:16 PM

RIO DE JANEIRO — For as long as Brazil has claimed most of the Amazon rainforest as its own, it has guarded it jealously.

The military, which regards the rainforest as perhaps its central responsibility, built one of its main bases in the jungle city of Manaus. Foreign scientists have been eyed with skepticism. Development of the Amazon has been seen as both a tool for economic advancement — and to ensure the forest stays Brazilian.

Now, amid raging fires in the Amazon and an international outcry over environmental policies critics say are exacerbating the crisis, long held fears that others are coveting what belongs to Brazil are flaring once again.

Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, a former fringe politician who came to power by appealing to nationalistic and antiglobalist sentiment, has said the international condemnations betray a modern day “colonialist mentality.” The former commander of Brazil’s army, Brazil’s army, Eduardo Villas Boas, lashed out at “direct attacks on Brazilian sovereignty.” Foreign Minister Ernesto Araújo called for the “governing of Brazil by Brazilians.”

The fires and the international concern they have provoked again revealed a central conflict in the Amazon: Who gets to decide what happens to it? Is Brazil, which commands of two-thirds of it, the primary warden? Or should the international community have a role in safeguarding the world’s most precious forest, which scientists say is essential to curbing the destabilizing
effects of global warming?

“Our house is burning,” wrote France President Emmanuel Macron on Thursday, tweeting a picture of the burning forest and calling on Group of Seven countries to discuss the emergency at their summit this weekend.

Our house is burning. Literally. The Amazon rain forest - the lungs which produces 20% of our planet’s oxygen - is on fire. It is an international crisis. Members of the G7 Summit, let’s discuss this emergency first order in two days! #ActForTheAmazonpic.twitter.com/dogOJj9big

— Emmanuel Macron (@EmmanuelMacron) August 22, 2019

Not your house, was the reply in Brazil. Our house.

The jostling for position has further complicated the response to the unfolding crisis. The Amazon, which is often referred to as the earth’s lungs, accounts for one-fourth of the carbon dioxide absorbed by the worlds’ forests, is rapidly being devastated by fire.

Since January, nearly 75,000 fires have burned in the Brazilian Amazon, according to the country’s National Institute for Space Research, an 85 percent increase from the same point last year. In the last two years, the area razed by fire has more than doubled, from 3,168 square miles during the first seven months of 2017 to 7,192 square miles during the same period this year, the institute reported.

Disturbing images of the forest aflame and cities cloaked in smoke this week ignited a rapid and overwhelming international backlash that Brazilian leaders are struggling to contain.

The challenge before them is now twofold: How to defend the Amazon itself, and how to defend Brazil’s image externally.

Bolsonaro, who complained on Thursday that Brazil didn’t have the resources to quell the forest fires, has convened emergency meetings and now says he’s considering sending the army to fight the fires. A state of emergency in Amazonas state has been issued, with other states expected to follow. More than 1,000 firefighters are trying to extinguish the blazes, flying drones to map areas at risk.

Flights throughout the Amazon were halted Friday as heavy smoke obscured the skies. Hospitals were deluged with patients suffering from smoke inhalation as rates of pneumonia and respiratory problems tripled in some states, according to Rondonia state government statistics.

Meanwhile, protesters are preparing demonstrations in 40 Brazilian cities and four European capitals on Friday. They condemn environmental policies of the Bolsonaro administration, which wants to develop the Amazon to stimulate Brazil’s dormant economy.

But perceived inaction by the Brazilian leader may end up further damaging Brazil’s economy.
German Chancellor Angela Merkel characterized the fires as an “acute emergency” on Friday and backed Macron’s call to put the issue on the G-7 agenda. Finland asked the European Union to consider banning Brazilian beef imports over fears that cattle farming is leading to widespread deforestation. A leading German newspaper is calling for sanctions against Brazil. And Germany and Norway may soon cut tens of millions of dollars in aid slotted for Amazon conservation projects.

The Europeans are urging the strengthening of environmental protections that critics say have loosened since Bolsonaro came to power. Deforestation has risen dramatically on Bolsonaro’s watch. In July alone, an area half the size of Rhode Island was lost.

The threats from international governments could spook Brazil’s powerful commodities industries — if they fear profits are at stake — into demanding that Bolsonaro do more to safeguard the Amazon. But analysts warn that too much foreign pressure could backfire.

“Fear about foreign invasion of the Amazon has been a central pillar of Brazil’s identity forever,” said Brian Winter, vice president for policy at Americas Society/Council of the Americas. “I don’t think international pressure, no matter how loud it gets, has any chance of changing government policy.”

Oliver Stuenkel, an associate professor of international relations at the Getúlio Vargas Foundation, said it has almost always gone badly when foreigners tried to claim the Amazon. He cited the time in 1989 when Al Gore, while a senator, said, “Contrary to what Brazilians think, the Amazon is not their property, it belongs to all of us.”

Brazilians have never forgotten.

Even years later, “people sent out these massive email chains to their friends, and one of the messages that I clearly remember, and kept getting week after week, was that Al Gore had said that if Brazil cannot protect the Amazon, then we must do it,” he said. “People interpreted it as a veiled threat and a question to Brazil’s sovereignty.”

Those fears were heightened earlier this month when an article in Foreign Policy magazine asked in its headline, “Who will invade Brazil to save the Amazon?” The article’s headline was later changed, but it consumed attention here for days and has since been used by supporters of Bolsonaro to raise suspicions of foreign intentions.

Now, as outsiders again question Brazil’s stewardship of the rainforest, Bolsonaro may feel emboldened.

“The Bolsonaro administration is trying to produce a rally-around-the-flag effect,” said Matias Spektor, an associate professor of international relations at Fundação Getúlio Vargas in Sao Paulo. “They are trying to denounce Macron and Merkel and the Norwegians and the international press and the NGOs as a coalition that is set on suspending Brazilian sovereignty
over the Amazon and it’s our duty to fight back.”

He said how the international community demands action will, to a large degree, dictate how
the Brazilians respond.

He added: “If the international community sounds interventionist, chances are that Bolsonaro
will be more successful in rallying people around the flag.”

*Jennifer Hassan in London contributed to this report.*
Brazilian protesters rail against Bolsonaro as Amazon fires rage on

Thousands of people take to streets in cities across country

Dom Phillips in Rio de Janeiro
Sat 24 Aug 2019 14.53 BST
Last modified on Sat 24 Aug 2019 14.55 BST

As fires burned across the Amazon and a worsening international and domestic crisis raged around Brazil’s far-right president, Jair Bolsonaro, protesters took to the streets of cities in Brazil and abroad. While the world’s richest countries discuss the crisis at the G7 summit more protests are planned on Sunday.

 Brazilians often take part in demonstrations, but rarely over environmental issues. On Friday demonstrators blocked São Paulo’s main Paulista Avenue, calling for the resignation of the environment minister, Ricardo Salles, and railing against Bolsonaro and the powerful agribusiness sector that supports him. One cardboard placard read “boycott Brazilian meat”.

“It is very good that this is happening. We needed something to move people,” said Felipe Campos, who took his seven-year-old godson on the
demonstration.

In Rio de Janeiro, a couple of thousand people crowded the steps of the town hall. Many said the fires were a result of Bolsonaro’s plans to develop the Amazon forest and permit mining and commercial agriculture on protected indigenous reserves. The fires happen each dry Amazon winter but soared this year as farmers and loggers, emboldened by Bolsonaro’s anti-environment rhetoric, torched felled trees and cleared land for pasture.

“We need to show how much we disagree with his policy,” said Mariane Rocha, a trainee teacher. Others were angry Bolsonaro blamed NGOs for the fires without providing evidence. “His whole political game is based on false accusations and mistakes,” said Beatriz Ferreira.

While Bolsonaro spoke on national television to say he was sending the army in to control the fires, a cacophony of pan-bashing rang out in the main cities, just as it had done for his predecessors Dilma Rousseff, impeached in 2016, and Michel Temer, twice arrested this year in a graft investigation.

“I have profound love and respect for the Amazon,” Bolsonaro said. He argued that more than 20 million people who lived in the Amazon wanted “economic dynamism proportional to the riches there”, ignoring the factories in a free-trade zone in jungle city Manaus, the world’s biggest iron ore mine in Pará state, and the cattle and soy farms eating into the rainforest’s Southern borders.

After talking to Donald Trump on Friday, Bolsonaro said some countries would press Brazil’s case at the G7 in the face of criticism from France, and sought to assure Brazilians that the situation was under control. “Even though the fires this year are not outside the average for the last 15 years, we are not satisfied with what we are seeing,” he said.

Scientists have accused Bolsonaro of playing a numbers game. In 2004 and 2005, fires raged out of control before tough environmental policies began bringing deforestation and fires under control. Deforestation began rising again in 2013, under Rousseff.

According to official data from Brazil’s space research institute, INPE, there have already been 25,000 fires in August in the Amazon biome – the most since 2010, when it was hit by a drought.

“It’s just plain manipulation,” said Alexandre Costa, a professor of
physics and climate science specialist at the State University of Ceará. “They are trying to make things look normal when pretty much they are not.”

August fires in the Amazon state of Rondônia – where Bolsonaro won 72% of the vote – have caused some flights to be cancelled and hospital admissions for respiratory problems have tripled in the state.

“The fires affect everyone, principally us in the indigenous reserves, because there is a lot of smoke, you can’t see properly, our vision burns,” said Maria Leonice Tupari, an indigenous leader.

José Carvalho, a former environment minister, blamed Bolsonaro’s policies for aggravating a recurrent problem and said Brazil should not shoulder the cost of protecting the Amazon alone. “The world should pay for the environmental services that the Amazon provides to the planet,” he said.
The record number of fires in Brazil's Amazon rainforest has coincided with a sharp drop in fines for environmental violations, BBC analysis has found.

Official data from Brazil's environment agency shows fines from January to 23 August dropped almost a third compared with the same period last year. At the same time, the number of fires burning in Brazil has increased by 84%. It is not known how many of these fires have been set deliberately, but critics have accused President Jair Bolsonaro's administration of "green lighting" the destruction of the rainforest through a culture of impunity.

Mr Bolsonaro has sent in the military to help put out the fires after coming under pressure from the international community, saying he wanted to "help protect" the Amazon.

The largest rainforest in the world, the Amazon is a vital carbon store that slows down the pace of global warming. It is known as the "lungs of the world" and is home to about three million species of plants and animals, and one million indigenous people.

**What does the data show?**

Analysis by BBC Brasil shows the number of fines handed out by the Brazilian Institute of Environment and Renewable Natural Resources (Ibama) for environmental violations has dropped significantly since Mr Bolsonaro took office on 1 January.

This year saw the lowest number of fines handed out by the agency in a decade (in the period between January and August)

Between 1 January and 23 August 2019, the total number of fines handed out was **6,895**

Ibama handed out **9,771** fines during the same period in 2018: a drop of **29.4%**

The total number of fines relating to "flora" - which includes deforestation and burning - dropped from **4,138** to **2,535** over the same period

And in the nine states that make up the Brazilian Amazon, the drop in fines relating to flora dropped from **2,817** to **1,627**
Why has there been a drop?
Neither Ibama nor the ministry of the environment answered the BBC's queries about the figures. Mariangélica de Almeida, a professor of environmental law who has defended clients over unfair fines, suggested to BBC Brasil that the figures for previous years could have reflected a culture of over-fining, in order to meet goals. However, others have pointed the finger directly at Mr Bolsonaro, who has scorned environmental activists and declared his support for clearing areas of the Amazon for agriculture and mining. Elisabeth Uema, who retired from Ibama last year, said it was clear even before Mr Bolsonaro was elected that he did not like Ibama. During his campaign, he pledged to limit fines for damaging the rainforest and to weaken the influence of the environmental agency.

The message was further underlined in April when Mr Bolsonaro ordered an investigation into officials who burned tractors and trucks belonging to loggers who were allegedly involved in illegal activities in the Jamari National Forest. This was a
long-held policy seen as a deterrent against illegal loggers. The agency's work, she said, had also been hampered by the fact that just eight of its 27 offices across the country now had a permanent head.

"The usual inspections, which had been planned since 2018, are happening. But little beyond that," Ms Uema, now the executive secretary of Ascema Nacional, the body representing Ibama employees, told BBC Brasil. Critics of the Bolsonaro administration insist the drop in fines does not mean fewer crimes against the environment are being committed.

Staying true to his word
Analysis by Luis Barrucho, BBC Brasil
The decline in the number of environmental fines at a time when Brazil has seen a spike in deforestation does not seem a coincidence to many. During last year's presidential race, Mr Bolsonaro vowed to open up the Amazon for commercial activity. When he was sworn in, he stayed true to his word.

Many of his critics say that Mr Bolsonaro operates a double standard when it comes to addressing environmental crimes, most of which remain unpunished. After all, the president promised a tough stance on criminal activity. Now, in face of national and international pressure, Mr Bolsonaro appears to have changed his tone and finally adopted measures to battle the fires. But he still hasn't acknowledged the link between the fires and the increase in deforestation in Brazil this year. And in a televised address on Friday he reinforced his plans to bring "economic dynamism" to the Amazon.

The question now is whether Mr Bolsonaro's recent moves in fighting the fires will be
accompanied by a consistent change in his environmental policies.

Amazon rainforest fires: global leaders urged to divert Brazil from 'suicide' path

Experts say international pressure may be only way to sway Bolsonaro government

Jonathan Watts
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Fri 23 Aug 2019 10.56 BST
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International pressure may be the only way to stop the Brazilian government from taking a “suicide” path in the Amazon, one of the country’s most respected scientists has said, as the world’s biggest rainforest continues to be ravaged by thousands of deliberate fires.

The large number of conflagrations – set illegally to clear and prepare land for crops, cattle and property speculation – has prompted the state of Amazonas to declare an emergency, created giant smoke clouds that have drifted hundreds of miles, and sparked international concerns about the destruction of an essential
carbon sink.

“Our house is burning,” tweeted the French president, Emmanuel Macron, who called for emergency talks on the subject at this week’s G7 summit. But the response to the crisis has been mixed: while Norway and Germany have halted donations to the Brazilian government’s Amazon fund, the EU has recently signed a trade deal with South America, and the UK spent this week focusing on post-Brexit business with Brazil.

On Wednesday, the UK trade minister Conor Burns was shaking hands with his counterparts in Brasilia and declaring a desire to “deepen relations”. Asked about the fires, he declined to comment but reportedly said Bolsonaro’s government had “legitimate ambitions to bring prosperity to its people”.

Scientists say the ongoing destruction will have dire consequences for Brazil and the world.

Carlos Nobre, a senior researcher with the Institute of Advanced Studies at the University of São Paulo, said the surge in deforestation was taking the rainforest closer to a tipping point beyond which swaths of the usually humid forest would become a dry savannah, with dire consequences for the climate, wildlife and forest dwellers.

Nobre said deforestation was on course to rise by 20-30% this year and was “very likely” to pass 10,000 sq km for the first time in more than 10 years. The trend has been worsening for several years, but it has accelerated under Bolsonaro, who has weakened the environment agency and expressed support for miners, farmers and loggers.
"The situation is very bad. It will be terrible," Nobre told the Guardian. "A very large number of these fires are due to the cultural push that ministers are giving. They are pushing deforestation because it is good for the economy. Those who do illegal deforestation are feeling empowered."

Nobre co-authored a study last year that predicted the southern, eastern and central regions of the Amazon would reach an irreversible stage of degradation once 20%-25% of the forest was cleared. This was not expected for 20-25 years, but Nobre said the tipping point was likely to be brought forward by about five years if this year’s rate of forest destruction continued.

In the five days to Wednesday, there were 7,746 fires in Brazil, according to data from the country’s National Institute for Space Research (INPE). This follows a 278% rise in deforestation last month. The figures are preliminary, but a rising trend has been observed by other satellite monitoring systems.

Brazil has recorded more than 72,000 fires this year, an 84% increase on the same period in 2018, according to the INPE. Not all were forest fires, but more than half were in the Amazon.

In one of the worst affected municipalities, Porto Velho, environmental activists said there were fires around the city and the streets were filled with smoke.
“People are scared. The hospitals are full of people with respiratory diseases. In 60 years, this is the first time I feel difficulty breathing,” said Ivaneide Bandeira Cardozo, the coordinator of the environmental organisation Kanindé. “It’s a thousand times worse than in other years.

“Bad farmers think they can commit all kinds of illegality because they will suffer no punishment ... It seems Brazil has no law, that all the laws are in tatters.”

In the soya frontier state of Mato Grosso, which has had more fires than anywhere else in Brazil this year, burning has been detected inside indigenous lands and nature reserves.

The vast majority of Brazilians want to protect the forest, according to opinion polls, but the government has prioritised business interests. Bolsonaro announced this week that he would resume mega-hydro projects in the Amazon that were halted on environmental grounds. His son has proposed a bill in Congress that would further weaken protections around indigenous territory and nature reserves.

Nobre said one of the few remaining ways to prevent a dangerous loss of forest was through external protests and consumer actions.

“Politicians in Brazil pay more attention to international pressure than the voice
of Brazilians,” he said. “I think international pressure is essential to reverse this tragic pathway. The agriculture sector in Brazil is very concerned that European consumers won’t buy Brazil produce. This may be the ultimate way to stop the Brazilian government from a suicide of the Amazon, which will have terrible consequences for the climate and for Brazil.”

These concerns were echoed by Thomas Lovejoy, a co-author of the tipping point study. In more than 50 years working in the Brazilian rainforest, he said this was one of its darkest moments, he said.

“There have always been some ups and downs, but the overall trajectory has been towards improvement. Now, Brazil is headed in the other direction.

“Under normal circumstances, the outside world would endeavour to help, but this Brazilian government is not interested in help.”

The scientists said there were already signs the tipping point was drawing closer. The dry season in the southern and eastern Amazon was more than 20 days longer than it was 30 years ago, droughts were more common, and plants that relied on high humidity were declining. In deforested areas, these trends were more pronounced.

Nobre said: “If the dry season extends two to three weeks more we will reach a critical moment. If it lasts longer than four months, this is the climate envelope of a savannah.”

Global heating is a major factor. As in Siberia, Alaska and California, climate breakdown is expected to make fires more frequent and more widely spread. Some of the biggest fires this week have been in the Bolivian Amazon, where deforestation has also been accelerating. According to Europe’s Copernicus satellite monitoring agency, this was the origin of the smoke that darkened the sky in São Paulo, thousands of miles away, on Monday.

There have been more large fires in Colombia and eastern Brazil this week than in the Amazon, where many agricultural burn-offs are in deforested areas.

In the Brazilian Amazon, only Amazonas state has registered a record for fires so far in August. Globally, huge fires in the Arctic have been even further from the norm, but Brazil remains the centre of concern because the problem is more immediately manmade.

Bolsonaro has tried to deflect blame. He sacked the head of the space agency
and said the satellite data was a lie. His chief of staff claimed European environmental concerns were a plot to constrain Brazil’s economic growth. His foreign minister tweeted that it was a tactic by the international left. This week, he suggested, entirely without evidence, that environmental groups might have started the fires to embarrass his government.

This last allegation was condemned on Thursday in a letter signed by 118 civil society organisations. “The president doesn’t need NGOs to burn the image of Brazil in the world,” they wrote.

Concerns about the deteriorating situation have prompted protests at Brazil’s embassies. The UN secretary general, António Guterres, has also urged Brazil to take action. “In the midst of the global climate crisis, we cannot afford more damage to a major source of oxygen and biodiversity. The Amazon must be protected,” he tweeted.

Macron said he would put the matter on the agenda of the G7 summit in France this weekend, while celebrities including Leonardo DiCaprio, Madonna and Cristiano Ronaldo have also raised the alarm.

In Brazil, a petition by the campaign group Avaaz asking the government to halt illegal deforestation has received 1.1m signatures. Federal prosecutors in Pará state are investigating why environmental inspections have declined and military police are absent from inspection operations, where they used to provide protection.

Some foreign governments and conservation groups are trying to deal directly with Brazilian state governments and NGOs rather than going through the national authorities.
The UK, however, has been more focused on building post-Brexit business relations. Brazil’s international trade minister, Marcos Troyjo, said that along with ongoing negotiations with the US, Burns’s visit was a sign that Brazil continued to have the trust of the outside world.

“I think there can be no more concrete proof that not only is Brazil open for business but the international community is willing to do business with Brazil,” he said.

The UK’s stance was condemned by Friends of the Earth. The campaigner Guy Shrubsole said: “If this is what we are prepared to do to line up trade deals, rather than take a world-stage opportunity to protect the obviously irreplaceable Amazon, you have to wonder where our priorities lie. The UK government shouldn’t trade with any countries who are ignoring their Paris climate change commitments, least of all Bolsonaro’s Brazil when they’re burning their forests down to sell us and the world soya and beef.”

As Fires Devastate the Amazon Rainforest, NASA Satellites Capture Grim Images
Smoke continues to grow as fires scorch wide swaths of the tropical forest.

Following continuing wildfires in the Amazon rainforest, NOAA/NASA's Suomi NPP satellite captured a natural-color image of smoke above South America using the VIIRS (Visible Infrared Imaging Radiometer Suite) instrument on Wednesday (Aug. 21). The image shows smoke above the Brazilian states of Amazonas (upper left), Para (upper right), Mato Grosso (lower right) and Rondonia (lower left).

(Image credit: NASA Worldview, Earth Observing System Data and Information System (EOSDIS))

Often referred to as "the planet's lungs" because it provides 20% of the world's oxygen, the Amazon rainforest has been ablaze for weeks. NASA has captured satellite images of the billowing smoke from the catastrophic fires, which continue to
As of today (Aug. 23), the wildfires have so far reached a number of Brazilian states, including Amazonas, Para, Mato Grosso and Rondonia, and the tropical forests of Bolivia. NOAA/NASA's Suomi NPP satellite captured a natural-color image using the VIIRS (Visible Infrared Imaging Radiometer Suite) instrument on Wednesday (Aug. 21). The image shows smoke from the fires gathered over the Amazon across South America.

Imagery from the Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer (MODIS) on NASA's Aqua satellite also shows the progression of the wildfires, including growing amounts of smoke over the region.
This satellite photo of South America shows the smoke above the fires in the Amazon rainforest on Aug. 11, 2019. The image was taken the Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer (MODIS) on NASA’s Aqua satellite.

(NASA Earth Observatory images by Lauren Dauphin, using MODIS data from NASA EOSDIS/LANCE and GIBS/Worldview and VIIRS data from NASA EOSDIS/LANCE and GIBS/Worldview, and the Suomi National Polar-orbiting Partnership.)

NASA's Earth Observing System Data and Information System (EOSDIS) Worldview application allows anyone to track fires around the globe using NASA satellite data. In Worldview, you can see the progression of fires in the Amazon and visible smoke over South America.

Brazil's National Institute for Space Research (INPE) has so far detected 39,601 fires this year in the Amazon, as reported by The New York Times. While it is currently the dry season in
this region, INPE reports that there has been a 79 percent increase in fires from 2018 during the same period.

"Not so long ago it was thought that Amazonian forests and other tropical rainforest regions were completely immune to fires thanks to the high moisture content of the undergrowth beneath the protection of the canopy tree cover. But the severe droughts of 1997-98, 2005, 2010, and currently a large number of wildfires across northern Brazil have forever changed this perception," Carlos Peres, a biologist at University of East Anglia, said in a statement.

This satellite photo of South America shows the smoke above the fires in the Amazon rainforest on Aug. 13, 2019. The image was taken the Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer (MODIS) on NASA’s Aqua satellite.
Natural fires in the Amazon are extremely uncommon. The fires now ravaging the Amazon rainforest were set by loggers and ranchers to clear land for crops and cattle pastures, according to the Washington Post. The span of the fires includes the land of Indigenous communities, which has been targeted by arsonists seeking to use the land for illegal logging, mining and cattle ranches, Amnesty reports.

Global outrage and protests erupted against Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro in response to the fires, following Bolsonaro's actions to weaken environmental protections and indigenous land rights in the country and for his support of mining and forestry in the Amazon, despite the prevalence of illegal mining and logging activities.

"The newly elected Bolsonaro administration in Brazil has rapidly dismantled Brazil’s institutional capacity to confront any threat against wild nature, while unleashing a widespread sentiment of impunity to thousands of landowners as haphazard agricultural frontiers continue to expand," Peres said.

This upheaval comes after the director of Brazil's space and climate-monitoring agency, Ricardo Galvão, was forced out of his position. Galvão left his position earlier this month after defending scientific findings that show a big increase in deforestation in the Amazon. Galvão has spoken out against
With the fire season in the Amazon approaching its midpoint, scientists using NASA satellites to track fire activity have confirmed an increase in the number and intensity of fires in the Brazilian Amazon in 2019, making it
the most active fire year in that region since 2010.

Fire activity in the Amazon varies considerably from year-to-year and month-to-month, driven by changes in economic conditions and climate. August 2019 stands out because it has brought a noticeable increase in large, intense, and persistent fires burning along major roads in the central Brazilian Amazon, explained Douglas Morton, chief of the Biospheric Sciences Laboratory at NASA’s Goddard Space Flight Center. While drought has played a large role in exacerbating fires in the past, the timing and location of fire detections early in the 2019 dry season are more consistent with land clearing than with regional drought.

“Satellites are often the first to detect fires burning in remote regions of the Amazon,” Morton said. NASA’s primary tool for fire detections since 2002 has been the Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer (MODIS) instruments on the Terra and Aqua satellites.

At this point in the fire season, MODIS active fire detections in 2019 are higher across the Brazilian Amazon than in any year since 2010. The state of Amazonas is on track for record fire activity in 2019.

Morton noted that 2019 fire activity statistics distributed by NASA and Brazil’s Instituto Nacional de Pesquisas
Espaciais (INPE) are in agreement. “INPE also uses active fire data from NASA’s MODIS sensors to monitor fire activity in the Brazilian Amazon,” Morton said. “As a result, NASA and INPE have the same estimates of changes in recent fire activity. MODIS detections are higher in 2019 than at this time last year in all seven states that comprise the Brazilian Amazon.”

MODIS fire detections are analyzed by the Global Fire Emissions Database (GFED) project, which includes Morton and colleagues from NASA Goddard, the University of California, Irvine, and Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. Over the years, the GFED team has processed 17 years of NASA satellite data to better understand the role of fire for changes in the Earth system. Their analysis of the southern Amazon includes parts of Brazil, Peru, and Bolivia that typically see fires between July and October. Their data plots are available online here.

January 1, 2012 - August 21, 2019
These plots show cumulative active fire detections from MODIS and the Visible Infrared Imaging Radiometer Suite (VIIRS) on Suomi NPP through August 22, 2019. The data confirm that 2019 is the highest fire year since 2012 (the start of the VIIRS record) across the seven states that comprise the Brazilian Amazon. In addition, fires in 2019 are more intense than previous years, as measured in terms of cumulative fire radiative power.
On August 19, 2019, the MODIS instrument on NASA’s Terra satellite captured a natural-color image (top of the page) that shows fires burning in the vicinity of Novo Progresso in the Brazilian state of Pará. The town is located along BR-163, a straight north-south highway that connects farmers in the southern Amazon with an ocean-going port on the Amazon river in Santarém. Pasture and croplands are
clustered around the highway in ordered, rectangular plots. To the west of the highway, winding roads connect a series of small-scale mines that extend deep into the rainforest.

The map above shows active fire detections in Brazil as observed by Terra and Aqua MODIS between August 15-22, 2019. The locations of the fires, shown in orange, have been overlain on nighttime imagery acquired by VIIRS. In these data, cities and towns appear white; forested areas appear black; and tropical savannas and woodland (known in Brazil as Cerrado) appear gray. Note that fire detections in the Brazilian states of Pará and Amazonas are concentrated in bands along the highways BR-163 and BR-230.
Since 2003, MODIS sensors on NASA’s Aqua and Terra satellites have made daily observations of thermal anomalies (usually fires) around the world. The fire detection map on this page is based on data from the Fire Information for Resource Management System (FIRMS), a product developed by the University of Maryland and NASA’s Applied Sciences Program. FIRMS provides near-real-time fire information to natural resource managers and researchers. Note that each point on the map does not necessarily correspond to one fire on the ground. Active fire detections represent the center of a 1 square kilometer area with one or more thermal anomalies. Sometimes one continuous fire can be recorded as multiple anomalies arranged in a line, representing a fire front.

Jair Bolsonaro claims 'profound love' for Amazon rainforest as criticism intensifies

President uses TV speech to criticise ‘disinformation’ about fire crisis, saying it cannot be used as pretext for sanctions

Tom Phillips Latin America correspondent

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Bolsonaro hit back at such criticism in his Friday night address, claiming the spreading of “disinformation” – inside or outside Brazil – would do nothing to solve the Amazon crisis.

“Brazil is an example of sustainability,” he claimed, as the Amazon state of Acre became the latest to declare a state of emergency because of the wildfires. “It is our duty to protect the forest. We are aware of this and we are taking action to fight illegal deforestation and any other criminal activities that put our Amazon at risk,” Bolsonaro added.

“We are a government that shows zero tolerance to crime and it will not be different when it comes to the environment.”

Marina Silva, Brazil’s former environment minister, told the Guardian it would take more than propaganda and “words in the wind” to solve the Amazonian “environmental emergency” caused by Bolsonaro’s policies.
“Bolsonaro won the election with his anti-environment, anti-human rights and anti-indigenous discourse and on taking office he has transformed these words into deeds,” said Silva, who oversaw a significant reduction in deforestation while minister from 2003 until 2008. “These policies cannot be allowed to prosper.”

Amid a growing chorus of international criticism, Donald Trump came to Bolsonaro’s defense on Friday. “I told him if the United States can help with the Amazon Rainforest fires, we stand ready to assist!” the US president tweeted.

“Our future Trade prospects are very exciting and our relationship is strong, perhaps stronger than ever before,” Trump said.

“Hugs from Brazil!” Bolsonaro’s son Carlos tweeted in response.

Bolsonaro tweeted that he had discussed “a big trade negotiation” with Trump and that the US president “had also offered to help us protect Amazonia and fight the fires, if we wish, as well as to work together on environmental policies that respect the sovereignty of nations.”

Bolsonaro enjoys comedy club outing as Amazon fires rage on

President watches rightwing comic as pre-recorded speech to nation on fighting fires airs

Dom Phillips in Rio de Janeiro
Sat 24 Aug 2019 19.26 BST
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While the Amazon burned and Brazilians demonstrated their outrage, Brazil’s far-right president Jair Bolsonaro went to a comedy club.

As the president’s pre-recorded speech to the nation explaining how he planned to use the army to fight the fires – while simultaneously insisting that the rate of burning of the forest was nothing out of the ordinary – was broadcast on television on Friday night, he was at a standup show in Brasília by right-wing Christian comic Jonathan Nemer.

The Amazon fires crisis has taken on international dimensions. It could jeopardise a trade deal between the European Union and South American trade bloc, Mercosur, that took 20 years to complete, and it will be discussed at this weekend’s G7 summit. Yet on Friday, as the O Estado de S Paulo newspaper revealed, Bolsonaro took a break from the rising pressure by listening to Nemer’s jokes.

The UOL site calculated that Bolsonaro was at the show at the same time as his broadcast aired. And Nemer himself posted a photo with a beaming Bolsonaro and first lady Michelle before the show on his Instagram.

“Standup in Brasilia is always a success, always full, but today we have the presence of someone very special ...
Bolsonaro!” he said in a video that he posted, before leading the chant of “Legend, legend” that is popular among Bolsonaro supporters.

Nemer demonstrated his pro-Bolsonaro stance in one standup show before the second round of voting in last year’s presidential election, playing losing leftist candidate Fernando Haddad as possessed by the devil of imprisoned former president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who had come to “finish Brazil off”.

Nemer also appears to share Bolsonaro’s scatological obsession. One video on Nemer’s YouTube channel is called Fart in Public and features him walking around in public pretending to break wind before revealing that it is a prank. “Did it seem real?” he asked one giggling woman in a clothes shop, showing off an electronic fart gadget. “No smell at all.”

Bolsonaro exposed himself to worldwide ridicule in March when he tweeted a video of a performer urinating on another on top of a bus shelter during Carnival to expose “what many street carnival groups have become” at Brazil’s biggest street party. In another tweet, he then asked: “What is a golden shower?”

On 16 August the Poder 360 (Power 360) political news site published five videos from this month alone in which the president used the word “cocô” – “poo” in Portuguese – five times in interviews.

In one, he told a reporter to defecate every other day to help the environment. In a speech, he said: “We are going to end the poo in Brazil. The poo is this race of corrupt and communists.” And in a freewheeling Facebook Live broadcast, he provided an impression of boiling faeces in a chemical toilet in 45C heat as he criticised a fine handed to a businessman for not providing a chemical toilet to employees.

At a press conference on Saturday, Bolsonaro’s defence minister, Fernando Azevedo e Silva, and environment minister, Ricardo Salles, explained how the army would fight the fires, stressing how important it was for Amazon states to cooperate. At the same time, at the G7 summit in Biarritz, the French president Emmanuel Macron called for the international community to help Brazil and its neighbours fight the fires.

Bolsonaro tweeted a link to an old television interview with Gen Eduardo Villas Bôas, in which the former commander of the army described his surprise when one of his officers found the king of Norway in a village in the Yanomami indigenous reserve during a past operation.

“In the words of General Villas Bôas, the real international interest is the Amazon. It hurts the soul to see Brazilians not seeing the fabricated campaign against our sovereignty in the region,” he tweeted.
Brazil’s Amazon has burned this badly before. This year’s fires are still bad

An environmental scientist discusses possible impacts from the fires

By Gloria Dickie
AUGUST 23, 2019 AT 5:58 PM

The Amazon rainforest in Brazil is being ravaged by fire. More than 74,000 fires have burned in the country since January, according to the country’s National Institute for Space Research — with 9,500 new forest fires igniting since just last week, the result of the natural dry season and fires intentionally ignited to clear forest. Black smoke billows from treetops, spreading across parts of South America and even shrouding the coastal city of São Paulo in near darkness.

The fires, along with concerns about biodiversity and climate change, have triggered global alarm. French President Emmanuel Macron and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on August 23 urged other leaders in the Group of Seven major industrialized nations to discuss what Macron called an “international crisis” at their summit beginning August 24 in France. “Our house is burning. Literally. The Amazon rainforest — the lungs which produces 20% of our planet’s oxygen — is on fire,” Macron tweeted.

Brazil’s government complained in response that it was being targeted in a smear campaign against the country’s president, Jair Bolsonaro, who was elected last year amid controversy over what many see as anti-environment policies that support slash-and-burn deforestation practices in the Amazon.

To learn more about the fires and what’s at stake, Science News spoke with environmental scientist Jonathan Foley, who is based in San Francisco and leads Project Drawdown, a worldwide network of scientists, advocates and others proposing solutions to global warming. The following conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

SN: Are these fires in the Brazilian Amazon unprecedented?
Foley: The fires this year are unlike anything we’ve seen in quite a while. The preliminary data suggest that the number of fires burning now is about 80 percent higher from this time last year. That’s really alarming.

But if we look at the longer term, we actually used to see fires like this, and even worse, back in the 1990s and the early 2000s. That’s when the world mounted a really serious effort. With Brazil taking the lead, and with international nonprofits, science agencies and big corporations, we actually managed to get deforestation of the Amazon in Brazil down by about 80 percent. It, and the fires, dropped hugely from the early 2000s to about 2013–2015. And now after all that work and all that success, we’re starting to see a major backslide into the bad old days.

SN: Are claims that the Amazon contributes 20 percent of the world’s oxygen correct?
Foley: It’s not really true. On land, all the tropical rainforests of the Earth — of which the Amazon is just a part, but a big part — does about 20 percent of
all the photosynthesis. But [life in] the oceans does it too, and that’s about half. That means instead of 20 percent, it’s really more like 10 percent, and the Amazon is less than half of that. At most, 5 percent of the world’s oxygen comes from the Amazon.

**SN: If not oxygen, what should we be worrying about with these fires?**

**Foley:** All the other bad news about the Amazon does ring true. Tropical forests, as a whole, contain about half of the world’s land-based biodiversity, and the Amazon is a big chunk of that. So when we burn down the Amazon, we’re losing species; we’re losing habitats; and we’re losing the lands that belong to indigenous communities and have for millennia.

Globally, about 10 to 15 percent of our CO₂ emissions comes from deforestation. If this is going back up again in Brazil, that’s going to make climate change even worse. It’s erasing a decade or two worth of progress. It’s a big problem for the world in terms of climate change.

And it’s a huge problem for people locally and regionally who are dependent on the forest and have preserved them for millennia. It’s just a huge tragedy.

**SN: What’s the worst-case scenario for the Amazon if these fires get worse?**

**Foley:** Some computer models, but not all of them, show a hypothetical scenario that when we clear rainforest, it starts to almost immediately warm up and dry out the atmosphere nearby. When we stand in a forest, it feels cool and moist. But when you clear-cut large areas of the forest, the air right around you gets hotter and drier, and it affects even rainfall patterns. The worry is if you start clear-cutting more of the Amazon, in theory, a tipping point could be reached where the rest of the forest dries out, too.

If that happens, the idea is that the Amazon could flip suddenly from being a rainforest to being a dry savanna-like ecosystem. We’re not absolutely certain about it, but even that theoretical possibility is kind of terrifying.
Amazon fires: G7 to release funds for fire-fighting planes

5 hours ago

International leaders at the G7 summit have agreed to provide logistical and financial support to help fight fires in the Amazon rainforest.

French President Emmanuel Macron said G7 countries would release $22m (£18m). However, President Jair Bolsonaro said Mr Macron's plan of an "alliance" to "save" the Amazon treated Brazil "as if we were a colony or no man's land".

A record number of fires is burning in Brazil, mostly in the Amazon, according to the country's space research agency.

The funding pledge was announced as the leaders of the G7 - Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK and the US - continue to meet in Biarritz, France.

Mr Macron said the funds would be made available "immediately" - primarily to pay for more fire-fighting planes - and that France would also "offer concrete support with military in the region within the next few hours".

However, Mr Bolsonaro - who has been engaged in a public row with Mr Macron in recent weeks - accused the French leader of launching "unreasonable and gratuitous attacks against the Amazon region", and "hiding his intentions behind the idea of an 'alliance' of G7 countries".

He wrote on Twitter that Brazil's sovereignty should be respected - and said he had discussed with Colombia's president the need for "a joint plan" from the countries that actually made up the Amazon region.
Despite Mr Bolsonaro's comments, his environment minister, Ricardo Salles, told reporters that the funding was welcome, Reuters news agency reports.

President Macron last week described the fires as an "international crisis" and pushed for them to be prioritised at the G7 summit which his country is hosting. G7 leaders also intend to discuss plans to reforest the Amazon, at the United Nations general assembly meeting in September.

The severity of the fires, and the response by Brazil's government, has prompted a global outcry and protests. According to Brazil's National Institute for Space Research (Inpe), more than 75,000 fires have been recorded in Brazil so far in 2019, most of them in the Amazon region.

Critics have accused Brazil's President, Jair Bolsonaro, of "green lighting" the Amazon's destruction through anti-environmental rhetoric and a lack of action on deforestation violations.

**What is Brazil doing?**

On Friday, facing mounting pressure from abroad, President Bolsonaro authorised the military to help tackle the blazes.

The Defence Ministry has said that 44,000 troops are available to help in the effort and officials said on Sunday that military intervention has been authorised in seven states.

Warplanes have also been drafted in to dump water on the areas affected.

The president tweeted on Sunday that he had also accepted an offer of support from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.
President Bolsonaro has previously been critical of the response of foreign governments and accused them of interfering in Brazil's national sovereignty. On Saturday, EU Council president Donald Tusk admitted it was hard to imagine the bloc ratifying the long-awaited EU-Mercosur agreement - a landmark trade deal with South American nations - while Brazil was still failing to curb the blazes. As criticism mounted again last week, Finland's finance minister went as far as calling for the EU to consider banning Brazilian beef imports altogether.

Amazon fires: G7 leaders close to agreeing plan to help, says Macron

International leaders gathering at the G7 summit are reportedly nearing an agreement to help fight fires in the Amazon rainforest. French President Emmanuel Macron said on Sunday a deal to provide "technical and financial help" was close. Leaders from the US, Japan, Germany, France, Italy, the UK and Canada continue their meeting in the seaside town of Biarritz on Monday. It comes amid international tension over record fires burning in Brazil. Critics have accused Brazil's President, Jair Bolsonaro, of "green lighting" the Amazon's destruction through anti-environmental rhetoric and a lack of action on deforestation violations.
The severity of the fires, and his government's response, has prompted global outcry and protests. President Macron last week described the fires as an "international crisis" and pushed for them to be prioritised at the G7 summit this weekend. On Sunday he said the leaders are "all agreed on helping those countries which have been hit by the fires as fast as possible. "Our teams are making contact with all the Amazon countries so we can finalise some very concrete commitments involving technical resources and funding." UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson said Britain would provide £10m to protect the Amazon rainforest.

G7 cash for Amazon fires is ‘chump change’, say campaigners
World leaders offer $20m now plus reforestation plan, but critics want major policy shifts

Jonathan Watts, Julian Borger and Angelique Chrisafis
Mon 26 Aug 2019 19.05 BST
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A Brazilian air force Hercules C-130 waiting to collect bags of water to fight fires in the Amazon rainforest on Saturday. Photograph: Isac Nobrega/Agencia Brazil/EPA

The G7’s pledge of $20m (£16m) to douse the fires in the Amazon has been
dismissed as “chump change” by environmental campaigners, as concerns grow about political cooperation on deforestation and other climate issues.

The summit host, the French president, Emmanuel Macron, told reporters he would try to deal with the long-term causes by creating an international alliance to save the rainforest, with details of a reforestation programme to be unveiled at next month’s UN climate meeting in New York.

But the US president, Donald Trump, skipped the summit session aimed at finding solutions to global heating through tree planting and shifting from fossil fuels to wind energy. In a press conference after the summit, he was dismissive of efforts to change direction.

“I feel the US has tremendous wealth ... I’m not going to lose that wealth on dreams, on windmills – which, frankly, aren’t working too well,” he said. “I think I know more about the environment than most.”

The most concrete outcome of the three-day summit of major industrialised democracies in Biarritz was the $20m that leaders promised to make immediately available to Amazonian nations such as Brazil and Bolivia, primarily for more firefighting planes.

The assistance plan, announced by the French and Chilean presidents on Monday, would involve a programme of reforestation, to be unveiled at the UN general assembly meeting next month.

“We must respond to the call of the forest, which is burning today in the Amazon,” said Macron.

Environmental groups said the emergency fire aid was insufficient and failed to address the trade and consumption drivers of deforestation. “The offer of $20m is chump change, especially as the crisis in the Amazon is directly linked to overconsumption of meat and dairy in the UK and other G7 countries,” said Richard George, the head of forests for Greenpeace UK. “The UK has plenty of leverage to stop the destruction of the Amazon by suspending trade talks with Brazil until its full protection is guaranteed. Any post-Brexit trade deals must prioritise the environment and human rights.”

But there was also appreciation that several G7 leaders, including the UK’s Boris Johnson, had expressed concerns about the Amazon. Macron said he had had long and in-depth talks with Trump on the Amazon fires and that Trump “shares our objectives” and was “fully engaged” in the joint effort to help put out
“It’s good to see the fate of this vital forest on the global agenda, as well as new commitments of funding, especially from the UK. But protecting this incredible forest, and the future of the planet, will take bolder action,” WWF said. “That will require us to stop importing commodities that drive deforestation.”

Conservation groups in Brazil said the sums were tiny compared with the hundreds of millions of dollars Brazil was losing in donations from Norway and Germany as a result of President Jair Bolsonaro’s policies in the Amazon.

“The amount offered [by the G7] is far from significant, but resources do not seem to be a problem for the Brazilian government,” said Adriana Ramos, the policy director of Brazilian NGO Instituto Socioambiental. “This money that has been blocked could be made available with a stroke of the pen by the president if he really had any political interest in combating deforestation and fires in this country.”

Satellite data has recorded more than 41,000 fires in the Amazon region so far this year – more than half of those this month alone. Experts said most of the fires were started by farmers or ranchers clearing existing farmland.

Environmental experts said Bolsonaro’s policies have fuelled accelerating deforestation and contributed to the intensity of the wildfires. France and
Ireland have threatened to block an EU trade deal with Brazil and three other Latin American countries if Bolsonaro does not change course.

Macron’s criticism sparked an angry response from Bolsonaro, who accused him on Monday of treating Brazil like “a colony or no man’s land”. But the international pressure has prompted the president to deploy two C-130 Hercules aircraft to tackle the fires.

The reforestation plan would require the consent of Bolsonaro and local communities. The Chilean president, Sebastián Piñera, a Bolsonaro ally on the political right, said he was in constant touch with the Brazilian president and that the two leaders had spoken as recently as Sunday. He said he was confident he would be able to convince him about the need for reforestation of the Amazon.

“I will discuss that with him. But I think that it is absolutely necessary. And I tend to think that he will agree,” Piñera told the Guardian.

“In the last 20 years, almost 10% of the use of the surface of the Amazon has been destroyed. We can recover that. It will take time. It will take money. It will take effort but we can do it,” said Piñera.

Piñera suggested Macron and other world leaders had set about trying to make Bolsonaro change course in the wrong way, criticising him rather than cooperating with him.

“The Amazon is in South America, and the countries there have sovereignty over that territory they want to protect,” Piñera said. “At the same time the Amazon is part of the health of the whole planet. And therefore it is reasonable that everybody is concerned about that. We have to find a compromise between those two.”

Piñera was speaking before news came that Bolsonaro had endorsed an insulting comment on Facebook about Macron’s wife, Brigitte.

Under the umbrella of the G7 summit, a coalition of more than 50 indigenous groups and environmental organisations issued their own statement, adding to the political pressure. With the support of Macron, they directly blamed Bolsonaro for accelerating the clearance of the rainforest by “systematically dismantling” environmental protection agencies, halting the demarcation of indigenous land, and verbally attacking anyone who opposed forest clearance.
The declaration urged the G7 to strengthen import restrictions on beef, soy, minerals and other products that originate from areas affected by deforestation, enhance due diligence for investments in the Amazon to ensure they do not violate human rights and environmental controls, and to support Brazil to achieve the Paris climate targets.

Brazil officials failed to act after warning of 'fire day’ in Amazon, prosecutors say

Investigation into why environment agency ignored warnings that farmers and land-grabbers were planning day of coordinated fires

Dom Phillips in Rio de Janeiro
Mon 26 Aug 2019 23.23 BST
Last modified on Mon 26 Aug 2019 23.38 BST

A firefighter works to put out fires along the road to Jacunda National Forest in Brazil’s Amazon on Monday. Photograph: Eraldo Peres/AP

Brazilian environmental officials and federal prosecutors say that they sent a warning that farmers and land-grabbers in the Amazon were planning a day of coordinated fires on 10 August to send a message to far-right president Jair Bolsonaro, but authorities failed to act.
Wildfires and burning deforested land are common during the Amazon’s dry seasons but peaked this month to more than 26,000 – the highest August figure since 2010. The environmental disaster has taken on international dimensions and overshadowed the G7 meeting in Biarritz.

Federal prosecutors in the Amazon state of Pará have now launched an investigation after revealing that they warned Brazil’s environment agency Ibama that a “fire day” demonstration was being planned around the town of Novo Progresso.

The prosecutors noted that the local Folha do Progresso news site had reported on plans for the fire day 5 August. “We need to show the president that we want to work” one local farmer told the website, adding that the only way to clear land for pasture was by felling trees and burning them.

But Ibama did not reply to the warnings until two days after the protests began, when it said that its operations had been hampered because police support had been withdrawn, putting their teams at risk in a region where they already face threats.

“It was a considerable failure,” prosecutor Paulo Moreira Oliveira told the Guardian. “There should have been immediate action to confront the risk of these fires.”

A separate investigation is examining the rise in deforestation on public land in Pará and whether public bodies and authorities could be responsible. Moreira Oliveira said that Ibama has imposed fewer fines for deforestation in Pará even though forest clearance has increased since Bolsonaro took office.

Two environment officials with experience in the region told The Guardian they also knew about the fire day beforehand. One official at the Chico Mendes Institute in Pará – which, like Ibama, is part of the Ministry of the Environment – said officials had asked bosses in Brasília for help, but requests for reinforcements were ignored.

“I know support was requested for an emergency plan, but it was not answered,” the official said. Both spoke anonymously because the government has banned environment officials from talking to media.

Brazil’s prosecutor-general Raquel Dodge said on Monday that there was a “suspicion of orchestrated action,” the G1 news site reported.
Bolsonaro has repeatedly attacked Ibama for running a “fines industry” and vowed to open up the Amazon for development.

He first blamed the fires on NGOs but provided no evidence, then conceded that farmers were also setting land on fire to increase productive areas and called on them to stop.

On Sunday, Brazil’s justice minister Sergio Moro tweeted that Bolsonaro had asked for a “rigorous investigation” and said federal police had been activated, after environment minister Ricardo Salles tweeted an article from the Globo Rural site about the “fire day”.

The site reported that around 70 rural farmers, land grabbers and businessmen from the towns of Novo Progresso and Altamira coordinated ‘fire day’ on the margins of the BR-163, a highway which leads through heavily deforested areas.

“These people are Bolsonaro’s electoral base,” said another environment official who has worked in the area. “The last thing they want to know about is protecting the Amazon.”

On Monday, the leader of a farmers’ union in Novo Progresso denied that there had been a plan for the fire day. “We have no knowledge of this... If there was anything like that, it was an isolated act,” Agamenon Menezes told the Agência Brasil news agency.

The Brazilian environment ministry did not respond to a request for comment.
There’s no doubt that Brazil’s fires are caused by deforestation, scientists say

By Herton Escobar Aug. 26, 2019, 4:45 AM

SÃO PAULO, BRAZIL—“Dry weather, wind, and heat”—those were the factors that Brazilian Minister of the Environment Ricardo Salles blamed for the rising number of forest fires in the Amazon in a recent tweet. But scientists in Brazil and elsewhere say there is clear evidence that the spike, which has triggered concerns and anger around the world, is related to a recent rise in deforestation that many say is partly the result of prodevelopment policies of the government of Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro.

The blazes are surging in a pattern typical of forest clearing, along the edges of the agricultural frontier, says Paulo Artaxo, an atmospheric physicist at the University of São Paulo here. Historical data show the two phenomena are closely linked: Chainsaws lead the way, followed by flames, and then cattle or other forms of development. “There is no doubt that this rise in fire activity is associated with a sharp rise in deforestation,” Artaxo says.

By Saturday, Brazil’s National Institute for Space Research (INPE) had counted more than 41,000 fire spots in the Brazilian Amazon so far this year, compared with 22,000 in the same period last year. The Global Fire Emissions Database project, which includes scientists from NASA’s Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Maryland; the University of California, Irvine; and Vrije University in Amsterdam, sees the same trend, although its numbers are slightly higher. (The main data source for both agencies is the Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer, an instrument aboard NASA’s Terra and Aqua satellites that detects the location and intensity of fires through a thermal signature. But each agency has its...
own algorithms to analyze the images and classify the spots.)

This year’s number is the highest since 2010, when El Niño caused a severe drought and INPE recorded 58,000 fires in the same period. This time, climatic anomalies can’t explain the uptick, scientists say. On the contrary: The dry season this year has been very mild. “If we had another drought year now, the situation would be much worse,” says Paulo Moutinho, an ecologist at the Amazon Environmental Research Institute (IPAM), a nongovernmental organization based in Belém, Brazil.

Instead, the evidence points to deforestation. The 10 municipalities with the highest rate of fire activity—some of which are the size of a small European country—are also the ones with the largest areas of deforestation recorded this year, according to IPAM.

It’s a perfect storm of fire and deforestation raging through the forest.

Paulo Moutinho, Amazon Environmental Research Institute

After a patch of forest is chopped down and valuable timber removed, developers set fires to clear the field of excessive vegetation. It can take months for the fallen logs to become dry enough to be burned but sooner or later, every patch of forest has to be set ablaze before it can be converted into pastures or farmland.

Not all fires are related to illegal forest clearing, however; flames are also used routinely to clear overgrown pastures, crop residues, and roadside vegetation. But this results in less intense fires. Many of the spots recently detected by the satellites are active for several days, burning with intense heat and producing smoke pillars that are tall and thick—all indicators that huge amounts of biomass are burning. “It’s a perfect storm of fire and deforestation raging through the forest,” Moutinho says.

Recent data have clearly shown that deforestation in Brazil is on the rise. From January through the end of July, 6800 square
kilometers were cleared, according to INPE, 50% more than in the same period last year. But Bolsonaro called the data “a lie” and had INPE’s director, physicist Ricardo Galvão, fired in early August.

Most analysts in Brazil and abroad blame the acceleration on Bolsonaro’s aggressive rhetoric and lax forest policies. “None of this is an accident,” Artaxo says. “What we are seeing is the result of a series of actions and inactions by the Brazilian government.” Brazil now has “clearly the worst anti-environment political climate in my lifetime,” Carlos Peres, a Brazilian ecologist at the University of East Anglia in Norwich, U.K., said in a 23 August statement.

The effects are both local and global. Deforestation is the main source of greenhouse gas emissions from Brazil. The smoke from the burning biomass is laced with massive amounts of soot, aerosols, and carbon dioxide that can interfere with weather patterns across the region and contribute to global warming. Studies show the Amazon functions like a giant air conditioner and humidifier for South America, producing and recycling much of the water vapor that flows into the lower parts of the continent.

Bolsonaro’s initial response to the crisis was to put the blame on nongovernmental organizations, suggesting—without proof—that they were setting the forest on fire to smear his government. The situation quickly escalated into an international crisis; Norway and Germany suspended their contributions to the Amazon Fund, which supports conservation and sustainable development projects in the region, and French President Emmanuel Macron accused Bolsonaro of lying about his commitment to protect the forest and combat climate change. Yesterday, Macron reportedly said that G-7 leaders, who are currently meeting in France, are ready to help Brazil to fight the fires.

Facing heavy criticism within Brazil, Bolsonaro summoned an emergency cabinet meeting on 22 August. The next day, he
authorized the deployment of troops to help combat the fires and made a 5-minute public address on national TV to profess his “deep love and respect for the Amazon” and promise that his administration would “act strongly” against the blazes.

Brazilian warplanes dump water on Amazon fires as outcry mounts

G7 leaders stepped up pressure on president Jair Bolsonaro to tackle destruction of precious rainforest

Reuters

Mon 26 Aug 2019 06.12 BST

Brazilian military aircraft have been sent to douse fires in the Amazon after president Jair Bolsonaro came under pressure to act. Photograph: Léo Corrêa/AP

Brazilian warplanes have begun dumping water on burning forest in the Amazon state of Rondonia, responding to an outcry over the destruction of the world’s largest tropical rain forest.

President Jair Bolsonaro authorised military operations in seven states on Sunday to combat raging fires in the Amazon, responding to requests for
assistance from their local governments, a spokeswoman for his office said.

A video posted by the defence ministry on Saturday evening showed a military plane pumping thousands of litres (thousands of gallons) of water out of two large spouts as it passed through clouds of smoke close to the forest canopy.

The response comes as leaders of countries in the G7 nations meeting in France expressed grave concerns over the fires.

French president Emmanuel Macron said on Sunday that the G7 was nearing a deal to provide “technical and financial help” to countries affected by the Amazon fires.

Nearly 80,000 fires have been registered across Brazil this year, the highest since at least 2013, according to space research agency INPE.

Bolsonaro announced the military would move in on Friday after several days of criticism from the public and world leaders that Brazil’s government was not doing anything to fight the fires.

He also said on Twitter that he had accepted Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s offer of a plane and specialised support for the firefighting operations, following a call between the two leaders.
But outside Rondonia, the government had yet to provide any operational details for other states. The defence ministry said in a briefing on Saturday that 44,000 troops were available in Brazil’s northern Amazon region but did not say how many would be used where and what they would do.

Military personnel around Porto Velho appeared to be largely coordinating firefighting efforts, according to a Reuters witness.

Asked for additional details, the ministry said that in all seven states that have asked for help, the military is planning operations to support firefighting initiatives already underway.

The justice minister, Sergio Moro, had also authorized a force of military police to assist in fighting the fires, with 30 set to be sent from Brasilia to Porto Velho. The president’s office posted to Twitter a photo of police officers on a plane bound for Rondonia set to arrive at noon.

Environment minister, Ricardo Salles, posted a video showing a caravan of yellow fire prevention trucks and other government vehicles, saying they were on the ground responding in Rondonia.

Colombian president Ivan Duque said on Sunday he would seek a conservation pact with other Amazonian countries - first in bi-lateral meetings in Peru this week and then at the United Nations general assembly.
“Colombia wants to lead a pact, a conservation pact, between the countries that have Amazon territory,” Duque said after meeting with an indigenous community in the Amazonian city of Leticia in southern Colombia. “We must understand the protection of our Mother Earth and our Amazon is a duty, a moral duty.”

The Amazon is the world’s largest tropical rainforest and is seen as vital to the fight against climate change because of the vast amounts of carbon dioxide that it absorbs.

Amazon fires: Brazil to reject $20m pledged by G7

Senior official says funds should be spent on reforesting Europe and not on ‘colonialist and imperialist practices’

Jonathan Watts Global environment editor, and agencies
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A senior Brazilian official has told the Emmanuel Macron to take care of “his home and his colonies” as Brazil rejected the offer from G7 countries of $20m (£16m) to help fight fires in the Amazon.

“We appreciate [the offer], but maybe those resources are more relevant to reforest Europe,” Onyx Lorenzoni, chief of staff to President Jair Bolsonaro, told the G1 news website.

Leaders of the G7 countries made the aid offer at a weekend summit in the French city of Biarritz hosted by the French president, who had put the fires high on the agenda. “We must respond to the call of the forest, which is burning today in the Amazon,” Macron had said on Saturday. Environmental campaigners have dismissed the sum as “chump change”.

“Macron cannot even avoid a foreseeable fire in a church that is a world heritage site,” Lorenzoni said in a reference to the fire that devastated the Notre Dame cathedral in April. “What does he intend to teach our country?

“Brazil is a democratic, free nation that never had colonialist and imperialist practices, as perhaps is the objective of the Frenchman Macron.”
The Brazilian presidency later confirmed the comments to Agence France-Presse.

Brazil’s environment minister Ricardo Salles had earlier told reporters that his country welcomed the G7 funding, but after a meeting between President Jair Bolsonaro and his ministers, the Brazilian government changed course.

Satellite data has recorded more than 41,000 fires in the Amazon region so far this year – more than half of those this month alone. Experts said most of the fires were started by farmers or ranchers clearing existing farmland.

The announcement of the $20m assistance package was the most concrete outcome of the three-day summit of major industrialised democracies in Biarritz and aimed to give money to Amazonian nations such as Brazil and Bolivia, primarily for more firefighting planes.

Environmental groups said the emergency fire aid was insufficient and failed to address the trade and consumption drivers of deforestation. “The offer of $20m is chump change, especially as the crisis in the Amazon is directly linked to overconsumption of meat and dairy in the UK and other G7 countries,” said Richard George, the head of forests for Greenpeace UK. “The UK has plenty of leverage to stop the destruction of the Amazon by suspending trade talks with Brazil until its full protection is guaranteed. Any post-Brexit trade deals must prioritise the environment and human rights.”

The US president, Donald Trump, skipped the summit session aimed at finding solutions to global heating through tree planting and shifting from fossil fuels to wind energy. In a press conference after the summit, he was dismissive of efforts to change direction.

“I feel the US has tremendous wealth ... I’m not going to lose that wealth on dreams, on windmills – which, frankly, aren’t working too well,” he said. “I think I know more about the environment than most.”

Tensions have risen between France and Brazil after Macron tweeted that the fires burning in the Amazon basin amounted to an international crisis and should be discussed as a top priority at the G7 summit.

Bolsonaro reacted by accusing Macron of having a “colonialist mentality.”

The diplomatic row between the leaders escalated after Macron condemned Bolsonaro for what he called “extraordinarily rude” comments made about his
wife, Brigitte, after Bolsonaro personally expressed approval online for a Facebook post implying that Brigitte Macron was not as good-looking as his own wife, Michelle Bolsonaro.

“He has made some extraordinarily rude comments about my wife,” Macron said at a press conference in Biarritz when asked to react to statements about him by the Brazilian government. “What can I say? It’s sad. It’s sad for him firstly, and for Brazilians,” he added.

Macron said he hoped for the sake of the Brazilian people “that they will very soon have a president who behaves in the right way”.

Ex-minister: Bolsonaro ‘most detested’ leader as he neglects the Amazon

Rubens Ricupero warns the far-right leader is wreaking havoc on Brazil’s environment and its global standing

Tom Phillips Latin America correspondent

Sun 25 Aug 2019 17.17 BST

Last modified on Sun 25 Aug 2019 21.10 BST

A patch of forest being cleared with fire in the municipality of Candeias do Jamari in the Amazon basin in north-western Brazil, on Saturday. Photograph: Victor Moriyama/AFP/Getty Images
Jair Bolsonaro’s neglect of the Amazon has made him “the most despised and detested leader” on earth, Brazil’s former environment minister has claimed, as the far-right leader again rebuked French president Emmanuel Macron for challenging his environmental record.

Rubens Ricupero warned Bolsonaro was wreaking havoc on both Brazil’s environment and its global standing, as Bolsonaro used Facebook to scold Macron’s “inappropriate and gratuitous attacks” over the Amazon fires and insult France’s first lady.

“These people are lunatics,” Ricupero said of Bolsonaro’s administration in an interview with the Guardian.

“In my opinion, he has turned himself into the most despised and detested leader in the world. I can’t see anyone else – not even Duterte in the Philippines ... not Trump, not anyone – who today provokes so much anger.”

“Never, in more than 50 years of our history, has there been a disaster involving Brazil’s image and the perception of Brazil so serious and probably so irremediable as this one,” added Ricupero, who was also Brazil’s finance minister and ambassador to the United States.

“Even in the military period – when Brazil had a negative image above all because of human rights, torture and disappearances – what went on here never drew so much attention as now.”

On Friday, amid a barrage of domestic and international censure, Bolsonaro ordered Brazilian troops to the Amazon to help contain the conflagration and professed “profound love” for a region environmentalists accuse him of helping destroy.
But Bolsonaro has continued to dismiss the crisis as a campaign of “fake news” and “disinformation” designed to discredit his government.

“We are doing what we can,” the rightwing populist told reporters in the capital, Brasília, on Saturday. “The Amazon is bigger than the whole of Europe. Even if I had 10 million people I wouldn’t be able to prevent [these fires].”

At the G7 summit, Macron is pushing for world powers to help put out the fires and fund reforestation and management projects in the Amazon.

Ricupero, Brazil’s minister for the environment and the Amazon in the early 1990s, admitted fighting illegal deforestation was a massive task in a sprawling region where the government’s presence was limited and environmental criminals often armed and dangerous.

“It’s a wild west like in the American films,” Ricupero said of the Amazon. “[It’s not like] Sussex or East Anglia ... Even in the best circumstances – even when a government is determined to enforce the law – it is an uphill struggle.”

But Ricupero accused Bolsonaro’s government of simply “folding its arms” when it came to protecting the Amazon, giving criminals a carte blanche to destroy by undermining Brazil’s environmental agency, Ibama.

“[Bolsonaro] has the same mentality as the military rulers in the 1970s: that the Amazon should be colonized and become soy plantations and cattle ranches,” Ricupero said.

“In the 1970s the government had a slogan: ‘Amazonia will be colonized by hooves of cows’. They never accepted the idea that the Amazon had to be preserved. They see no reason for the forest not to be chopped down and replaced with agriculture and mining. This is his [Bolsonaro’s]
mindset.”

Marina Silva, Brazil’s environment minister from 2003 until 2008, said she felt “deep sadness and anger” at the devastation unfolding in the region where she was born and raised.

Silva agreed Amazon destruction was not a new phenomenon.

“We’ve had fires and deforestation under every government – but with the difference that [before] you had environment ministers … who were genuinely committed to protecting the forests, biodiversity and our water resources,” Silva said.

By contrast, Bolsonaro’s environment minister, Ricardo Salles, was “an anti-environment minister” actively working against nature. “Instead of strengthening his employees he strengthens the offenders,” Silva said.

Ricupero said: “He isn’t a minister – he’s an anti-minister. He’s the opposite of what a minister should be.”

Ricupero said he feared Bolsonaro’s antagonistic reaction to European criticism meant international cooperation to control the destruction would be hard.

Only “the fear of economic consequences” – such as a boycott of Brazilian products or the halting of a trade deal with the EU – were likely to make Bolsonaro’s Brazil change course. “If nothing concrete happens, beyond the complaints … this will continue getting worse,” he predicted.

Bolsonaro continued his attacks on Macron on Saturday, accusing the French president of treating Brazil like “a colony or a no man’s land”.
Bolsonaro’s education minister, Abraham Weintraub, branded Macron a characterless, “opportunistic knave” and “a cretin”, while Brazil’s president mocked the French first lady’s appearance on Facebook.

Ricupero said: “The impression I have right now is that Brazil is committing suicide. That the president himself is ‘suiciding’ the country. It is a strong expression – but it’s what I feel. Destroying your own patrimony is tantamount to suicide.”

The Ravaging of Amazonia

A global treasure lies at the mercy of the smallest, dullest, pettiest of men.

By Vanessa Barbara
Contributing Opinion Writer
Published Aug. 24, 2019
Updated Aug. 25, 2019
SÃO PAULO, Brazil — When I first set foot in the Amazon rain forest, in the Anavilhanas Archipelago, northwest of the city of Manaus, I experienced something that can only be described as awe: an overwhelming sense of connection with the universe. Cheesy, I know. But this is something that we rarely feel — only upon seeing a clear tropical night sky, or the ghostly flickering of the northern lights or even the vastness of a French Gothic cathedral.

From the outside, the Amazon is a massive, undistinguished canopy of trees, but once you’re inside it, it is indeed a “monumental universe,” in the words of the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss. It has a strikingly layered structure: The soil lies beneath an entanglement of roots, mosses and decomposing leaves; pale trunks appear and disappear as they climb up into the lush foliage. The tallest trees can reach up to 200 feet, almost the height of the
towers of Notre-Dame. And now it is their turn to burn.

The first sign that the Amazon would not have a good year came this month, when the government sacked the head of the National Institute for Space Research, the physicist Ricardo Galvão, who was unpatriotic enough to release data showing a 278 percent jump in deforestation in July compared with the same month the previous year. President Jair Bolsonaro said that he should have been warned about such evidence, which could cause the country great harm internationally. “This is not a posture from a Brazilian, someone who wants to serve his country and is concerned about Brazil’s businesses,” Mr. Bolsonaro said. He suggested that the agency could be lying to make the government look bad.

By then, however, a number of satellite images had emerged showing truly alarming numbers of fires across the Amazon: dozens of smoldering patches of scorched earth, clouding the dark green landscape. Soon they were followed by a more concrete image of a local firefighter offering water to a thirsty armadillo, prompting outrage across the globe. (Later, in an interview, the firefighter explained that the photo had not been taken in the Amazon, but rather in a nearby grassland region.) According to the institute, the number of fires detected in Brazil so far this year is 84 percent higher than in the comparable period last year; more than half of those are in the Amazon region. More than 1,300 new fires were added over the course of just two days this week. Satellites have captured images of the smoke from the flames sweeping across several Brazilian states. In São Paulo, where I live, dark clouds blackened the sun on Monday, turning day into night. The city is thousands of miles away from the Amazon. Meteorologists scrambled to explain what had happened, but many suspect that the culprit was low-lying clouds from a cold front.
A demonstration in Barcelona against the Amazon fires on Friday.
Lluís Géne/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

A protestor against the deforestation of the Amazon outside the Brazilian embassy in Mumbai on Friday.
On Twitter, the environment minister, Ricardo Salles, attributed the surge in fires to dry weather, wind and heat. But scientists and environmental organizations disagree. According to a recent statement by researchers from the Federal University of Acre and the Amazon Environmental Research Institute, the fires are directly related to deforestation. They were probably set by cattle ranchers, farmers and loggers to clear the land: First they cut the trees; then they wait for the dry season; then they wait until it’s clear they have a president who will do nothing to stop them; then they set it all ablaze.

On Aug. 10, farmers from the northern state of Pará organized a coordinated “fire day” to burn land for agriculture, emboldened by Mr. Bolsonaro’s anti-environmental rhetoric and encouraged by the government’s commitment to weakening the agencies that enforce environmental regulations.

Mr. Bolsonaro, who once threatened to leave the Paris climate accord, is famously dismissive of any environmental concerns — he claims Brazil suffers from an “environmental psychosis” — which, in his opinion, only hinder economic development. In July, he said that environmental issues mattered only to “vegans, who eat only vegetables.” He also declared Brazil and its resources a “virgin” that “every pervert outsider wants.” When asked about the fires, the president suggested, with no evidence, that nongovernmental organizations could have started them to generate negative attention toward his government.

It’s been heartbreaking to watch the country burn, both literally and figuratively, under Mr. Bolsonaro. Right now, Brazilians feel a collective, perplexed grief for everything we stand to lose — not only as Brazilian citizens, but as humans. The Amazon is often described
as the Earth’s “lungs,” producing 20 percent of our atmosphere’s oxygen. It also stores carbon dioxide, a major cause of global warming.

And yet, what hurts me most is the bare idea of the millions of Notre-Dames, high cathedrals of terrestrial biodiversity, burning to the ground; all those layers of 100-year-old chestnut trees, vines, rubber trees, palm trees, banana plants, orchids, bromeliads, passion fruit flowers; the macaws, toucans, capybaras, sloths, jaguars, anacondas and ants that called them home. A monumental universe, turning, as I write this, into pasture and soy.

BRASILIA/PORTO VELHO, Brazil (Reuters) - Brazilian warplanes are dumping water on the burning forest in the Amazon state of Rondonia, responding to a global
outcry over the destruction of the world’s largest tropical rain forest.

As of Sunday, President Jair Bolsonaro had authorized military operations in seven states to combat raging fires in the Amazon, responding to requests for assistance from their local governments, a spokeswoman for his office said.
Reuters accompanied a firefighting brigade near the state capital of Porto Velho, where there were areas larger than football fields that had been charred, but active fires were contained to small areas of individual trees.

The dozen or so yellow clad firefighters from environmental enforcement agency Ibama easily cleared brush from around a burning stump with a leaf blower, doused it with jets connected to water packs mounted on their backs and covered it in earth.

A video posted by the Defense Ministry on Saturday evening showed a military plane pumping thousands of liters (thousands of gallons) of water out of two giant jets as it passed through clouds of smoke close to the forest canopy.

The response comes as leaders of countries in the Group of Seven (G7) nations
currently meeting in France expressed grave concerns over the fires.

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Asked for additional details, the Defense Ministry told Reuters in a statement that in all seven states that have asked for help, the military is planning operations to support firefighting initiatives already underway.

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“Colombia wants to lead a pact, a conservation pact, between the countries that have Amazon territory,” Duque said after meeting with an indigenous
community in the Amazonian city of Leticia in southern Colombia. “We must understand the protection of our Mother Earth and our Amazon is a duty, a moral duty.”

The Amazon is the world’s largest tropical rain forest and is seen as vital to the fight against climate change because of the vast amounts of carbon dioxide that it absorbs.

The Amazon, which provides 20% of the planet’s oxygen, is home to an estimated one million indigenous people from up to 500 tribes as well some three million species of plants and animals, including jaguars, sloths, giant otters, river dolphins, howler monkeys, toucans, reptiles, frogs and insects.

Brazilian climate scientist Carlos Nobre said he worries if 20-25% of the ecosystem is destroyed that the Amazon could reach a tipping point, after which it would enter a
self-sustaining period of dieback as the forest converts to savannah. Nobre warned that it is not far off with already 15-17% of the rain forest having been destroyed.

Posted at 17:16
‘Bolivia has been burning the Amazon for much longer than Brazil’

Brazil is not the only country affected by the wildfires in the Amazon. The president of neighbouring Bolivia, Evo Morales, has said he is ready to accept international help to cope with a growing number of forest fires which are out of control. Until now, the left wing leader has been reluctant to agree to offers of assistance from the United States and some Latin American countries. Much of Santa Cruz province, a key agricultural area where more than a quarter of the population lives, is now in flames. Monica Machicaao, a journalist from the Reuters news agency in Bolivia, spoke to BBC Newsday.
Amazon fires: Angola and DR Congo 'have more blazes'

5 hours ago

The severity of fires in the Amazon has prompted a global outcry. But, amid the protest, some are questioning how this compares with the rest of the world, with surprising results.

The issue has got people checking out Nasa's maps of fires around the world. When you look at the map from Sunday, it clearly shows more fires burning in central Africa.

Over a period of two days last week Angola had roughly three times more fires than Brazil, according to data Bloomberg news agency obtained from Weather Source.

The data said there were 6,902 fires in Angola and 3,395 fires in neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo, compared with just 2,127 fires in Brazil.

This has shocked many on Twitter.
The vital bits of information the maps from Nasa do not show is whether they are grassland or forest fires and how big the fires are. Observers point to similar fires two years ago which, Nasa said, appeared to have been started on purpose. The suggestion is that farmers have cut down some of the vegetation and set fire to the rest in order to clear the land to plant crops. The farming technique, known as slash and burn, is controversial as environmentalists warn it can lead to deforestation, soil erosion and a loss of biodiversity.
But it is the cheapest way to clear land, has the advantage of killing disease and the ash provides nutrients for future crops. So burning fields remains popular among farmers.

It happens every year ahead of the rainy season, which is expected to start in Angola and DR Congo in the next month or so. This could go some way to explaining why the fires have not attracted much attention.

'All you can see is death.' The regions reeling from the Amazon rainforest fires

By Nick Paton Walsh and Natalie Gallón, CNN

Updated 0742 GMT (1542 HKT) August 26, 2019

Porto Velho, Brazil (CNN) The smoke is so thick, at times the Cessna airplane had to climb to stay out of it. At times your eyes burn and you close the air vents to keep the cabin habitable. Sometimes it is so bad, it is hard to see how bad it actually is on the ground below.

Flying above the Amazon’s worst afflicted state (during last week), Rondonia, is exhausting mostly because of the endless scale of the
devastation. At first, smoke disguised the constant stream of torched fields, and copses; of winding roads that weaved into nothing but ash. Below, the orange specks of a tiny fire might still rage, but much of the land appeared a mausoleum of the forest that once graced it. "This is not just a forest that is burning," said Rosana Villar of Greenpeace, who helped CNN arrange its flight over the damaged and burning areas. "This is almost a cemetery. Because all you can see is death."

The stark reality of the destruction is otherworldly: like a vision conjured by an alarmist to warn of what may come if the world doesn't address its climate crisis now. Yet it is real, and here, and now, and below us as we are scorched by the sun above and smoldering land below.

"This is not just a forest that is burning", said Greenpeace’s Rosana Villar. "This is almost a cemetery. Because all you can see is death."

Rondonia has 6,436 fires burning so far this year in it, according to Brazil’s National Institute for Space Research (INPE). NASA says the state has become one of the most deforested states in the Amazon.
Brazil has 85% more fires burning than this time last year -- up to 80,626 nationwide as of Sunday night. President Jair Bolsonaro, after being scolded, called a liar, and threatened with trade sanctions by some leaders of the G7, declared on Friday he would send 43,000 troops to combat the Amazon's inferno. (He had previously fired the director of INPE for releasing figures he didn't agree with, and in his Friday speech still said the Amazon should be used to enrich Brazil’s people).

Yet while the Amazonian city of Porto Velho reels from a cloud of smoke that blights its mornings, and from the occasional C130 cargo plane buzzing overhead, the forest around it that we flew over showed no sign of an increased military presence Sunday.

The Brazilian state of Rondonia has 6,436 fires burning so far this year in it, according to Brazil’s National Institute for Space Research (INPE).

The task is enormous, almost insurmountable. In the areas where the smoke it most intense, the sun barely creeps through to shine off the river. I saw one bird in this natural sanctuary in three hours. Flames seem to move in a steadfast line across the savannah, swallowing whole what
forest remains in their path. There are the occasional buildings, isolated in the newly created farmland around them. But no signs of human life, just cattle, caught in the swirling clouds and flame. They are often the reason for the fires: the rush to deforest sparked by a growing global market for beef. Cattle need soy grown on the fields, or to graze on the grass, and then become the beef Brazil sells to China, now a trade war with the United States has changed the market.

The reason for the fires is disputed, but not that convincingly from this height. Bolsonaro has said that they are part of the usual annual burn, in this, the dry season. But his critics, many of them scientists, have noted the government’s policy of encouraging deforestation has boosted both the land clearance that helps fires rage, and given the less scrupulous farmer license to burn.

As the rate of land clearance reaches one and a half football fields a minute -- the statistics for the damage done to the forest emulate the incomprehensible mystery of its vanishing beauty -- many analysts fear a tipping point is nearing.

The more forest is cleared, the less moisture is held beneath its canopy, and the drier the land gets. The drier the land gets, the more susceptible it is to fire. The more fire, the less forest. A self-fulfilling cycle has already begun. The question is when it becomes irreversible.

Brazil is already dealing with the likelihood of permanent changes to its ecology. "The Amazon is extremely fundamental for the water system all over the continent," said Villar from Greenpeace. "So if we cut off the forest we are some years not going to have rain on the south of the country."

It is hard to see any claims of future doom as alarmist, when you see skylines rendered invisible by smoke, flames march across the plains like
lava, and hear disinterested taxi drivers tell you they have never seen it so bad. The apocalyptic future is here, and it is impatient.
Brazil rejected millions in Amazon aid. Hours later, Bolsonaro hinted at a reversal

By Ivana Kottasová, Shasta Darlington, Claudia Dominguez, Vasco Cotovio and Jonny Hallam, CNN

Updated 2016 GMT (0416 HKT) August 27, 2019

São Paulo, Brazil (CNN) Brazil has escalated its war of words with global powers over the Amazon fires, announcing it would reject $20 million in foreign aid before the country’s president appeared to contradict his own representatives and leave the door open to accepting the funds.

The special communications office for President Jair Bolsonaro told CNN on Tuesday morning that Brazil would turn down the money that was pledged at the G7 summit in France the day before. But around an hour after his communications office confirmed that Brazil would reject the funding, Bolsonaro appeared to cast doubt on the matter. "Did I say that? Did I? Did Jair Bolsonaro speak?" he asked reporters outside the presidential residence.

The Brazilian president added that he would only respond to the offer once French President Emmanuel Macron withdrew his insults against him. Macron had accused Bolsonaro of "lying" to him about climate commitments during trade negotiations.

The Amazon blazes have caused a public spat between Bolsonaro and Macron, who has been vocal about the need for an international response to the fires. Macron spearheaded the effort and announced the aid package at the G7 summit he hosted in Biarritz.

Bolsonaro's chief of staff waded into the dispute between the two leaders on Monday evening, suggesting that the money should instead be used "to reforest Europe."

"Macron is unable to avoid a preventable fire in a church that is at a World Heritage Site and he wants to show us what is for our country? He has a lot to look after at home and the French colonies," Onyx Lorenzoni was quoted as saying by G1 Globo late Monday night. He was referring to the Notre Dame Cathedral fire in April.

Later on Tuesday, during a meeting with governors of states affected by the fires, Bolsonaro struck a more conciliatory tone, announcing that no one in his administration was opposed to negotiating with France.

"We even thank the G7 for its work," he said. However, he added that Macron "should think two, three times before he attempts to get out of the complicated situation he is in, with huge disapproval within his own country, by messing with us."

For days, Bolsonaro had been saying the idea of creating an international alliance to save the Amazon would be treating Brazil like "a colony or no man’s land," calling it an attack on the country’s sovereignty.

Satellite data provided by European monitoring service Copernicus (CAMS) on Tuesday now shows that fire activity over the Brazilian Amazon has decreased in recent days and is trending at or below normal levels for the last week of August, according to data records that go back to 2003.

"Over the last few days, fire activity seem to have in general been below average compared to the previous 16 years in the GFAS dataset," CAMS scientist and fire expert, Mark Parrington, said.
International help

Speaking alongside Macron at the G7 on Monday, Chile’s President Sebastián Piñera announced a new two-step process for fighting the Amazon blazes.

He said the first step was to cover the emergency and collaborate with Amazonian countries in fighting the fires. The next phase would be focused on protecting the forest’s biodiversity then working on reforestation. Piñera said this would be agreed at the United Nations General Assembly in New York in September.

"The second step would be possible because of the collaboration between the Amazonian countries and the G7 countries," Piñera said, adding this would be done while "of course always respecting their sovereignty."

The conflict between Macron and Bolsonaro got personal when a user post on the Brazilian president’s Facebook page compared the appearance of his wife with that of the French first lady, implying that Macron was jealous.

Bolsonaro’s official account then commented: "Don’t humiliate the guy ... haha."

Macron described the remark as "extremely disrespectful."

Bolsonaro’s government had found itself under increasing international pressure over its environmental policies even before the major fires broke out earlier this month.

Germany and Norway both suspended their contributions to Brazil’s Amazon Fund earlier in August. Over the past decade, Norway has donated $1.2 billion to the conservation fund, which is managed by the Brazilian Development Bank. Germany has contributed $68 million.

The German Environment ministry said earlier this month it was suspending the program, and its planned donation of up to $35 million euros ($39 million), because of doubts over Brazil’s efforts to reduce deforestation.

A few days after that, Norway announced it suspended donations because the Brazilian government dissolved the fund’s steering and technical committees.

While some world leaders have criticized the Brazilian president for his handling of the fires, he received praise from US President Donald Trump, who tweeted Tuesday that Bolsonaro was doing a "great job" that was "not easy."

"He and his country have the full and complete support of the USA!" Trump tweeted.

Bolsonaro said the tweet pleased him "a lot". "We know that President Donald Trump from whom I have profound appreciation, he has his communication via social media and he just tweeted this, and this is something that pleases me a lot," he said.

Shasta Darlington reported from São Paulo, Claudia Domínguez and Jonny Hallam reported from Atlanta, Vasco Cotovio reported from London and Ivana Kottasová wrote in London.

Bolivia: catastrophic wildfires devastate forest in echo of Brazil's Amazon crisis

Bolivia’s president announced he would interrupt his re-election campaign for a week to help coordinate foreign aid efforts

Dan Collyns in Iquitos
@yachay.dc
Tue 27 Aug 2019 06.30 BST
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As fires continue to rage in Brazil, nearly a million hectares (6,200 sq miles) of farmland and unique dry forest have been destroyed by weeks of blazes across the border in Bolivia, where the flames have now reached the country’s Amazon region.

Initial estimates indicate 600 hectares of rainforest have been destroyed in the north-eastern region of Bení, where the fires now threaten indigenous populations.

“This is the biggest ever catastrophe for biodiversity in Bolivia,” said Fernando Vargas, an indigenous leader in the Isiboro Sécure Indigenous territory and national park, known as Tipnis by its Spanish acronym.

“But this is not a natural disaster but a manmade one,” he told the Guardian.

Bolivia’s president, Evo Morales, had previously rejected offers of international help to battle the fires, but on Sunday he announced that he would interrupt his re-election campaign for a week to help coordinate foreign aid efforts.

“Any cooperation is welcome, whether it comes from international organisations, celebrities or from the presidents who offered to help,” Morales said in Cochabamba, where he had been campaigning for a fourth term in office.

The leading opposition candidate, Carlos Mesa, also suspended his election campaign in response to the national crisis.

Morales said he had been called by global leaders, including the presidents of Paraguay, Chile and Spain, as the G7 group of the world’s richest nations announced an aid package to fight Amazon fires.

Firefighters from Chile and Argentina as well as France, Spain and Russia were deployed to help fight the flames, according to local media reports.

However protesters and the political opposition say Morales’ government needs to declare a state of emergency in the zone in
order to allow foreign help in.

More than 2,700 fires had been registered by Bolivia’s early warning fire detection agency on Monday, in a swath of flames across the country, from the Amazon north-east to the south-eastern Chaco biome.

“It’s not a coincidence that less than a month ago the president declared a law which permitted slash and burn farming practices,” said Adriana Rico, a Bolivian biologist.

Known in Bolivia as *chaqueo*, slash-and-burn is often practiced by migrant small farmers as a cheap and easy way to clear land, she added. Blazes have destroyed part of the Chiquitano forest, the Amazon and Bolivia’s Pantanal region which it shares with Brazil and Paraguay.

“It’s very sad for us indigenous peoples, we’ve lost our means of survival,” said Adolfo Chávez, the former president of the Bolivian indigenous confederation CIDOB. He said Morales had turned his back on indigenous peoples by allowing the destruction of their habitat for the advance of agribusiness.

Last week, the pan-Amazon indigenous organisation COICA accused Morales, and his Brazilian counterpart, Jair Bolsonaro, of “gutting every environmental and social strategy to strengthen environmental governance of the Amazon”.

It declared the two governments as not welcome in the Amazon and held them personally accountable for the “cultural and environmental genocide” in the world’s largest wilderness.

“This month’s devastating fires are the all-too-predictable consequence of the Morales government’s decree authorising new land claims on cleared land”, said Carwil Bjork-James, an anthropology professor at Vanderbilt University.
Amazon rainforest fires: an environmental catastrophe – in pictures

Smoke billows from fires in Candeias do Jamari, near Porto Velho in the Amazon state of Rondônia.
Photograph: Victor Moriyama/AFP/Getty Images

Fires are raging across the world’s largest tropical rainforest as farmers, land-grabbers and loggers torch trees and clear land for crops or grazing. According to Brazil’s National Institute of Space Research, the number of fires detected by satellite in the Amazon region this month is the highest since 2010. Bowing to international pressure and a global outcry over the destruction of a vital resource in the fight against climate change, president Jair Bolsonaro authorised the deployment of Brazil’s armed forces to help combat blazes, with warplane dumping water on burning tracts of Amazon.
Critics say the large number of fires this year has been stoked by Bolsonaro’s encouragement of farmers, loggers and ranchers to speed up efforts to strip away forest
Neri dos Santos watches a fire burn at the farm where he works in Nova Santa Helena.

Photograph: Joao Laet/AFP/Getty Images

A labourer and his friend watch a fire spread to a farm next to a highway in Nova Santa Helena.
A snake slithers across a burned-out tract of Amazon jungle in Porto Velho in the state of Rondônia.

Photograph: Ueslei Marcelino/Reuters
A carcass lies next to blackened vegetation near Porto Velho.
Photograph: Joedson Alves/EPA

Smoke rises from a fire in Novo Progresso in the state of Pará. Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro first blamed the fires on NGOs,
then conceded that farmers were also setting land on fire to increase productive areas.

Photograph: Victor Moriyama/Greenpeace Brazil

A section of the Amazon rainforest that has been destroyed by wildfires in Porto Velho.
Photograph: Victor Moriyama/Getty Images
Brazilian farmer Aurelio Andrade and his dog walk through a burned-out area near Porto Velho.
Photograph: Carl de Souza/AFP/Getty Images

C-130 Hercules aircraft dumps water in an attempt to fight raging wildfires.
A Brazilian warplane dumps water on burning forest.
Photograph: Brazil Ministry of Defense/AP

Smoke billows in the Amazon biome in Altamira in the state of Pará.
Photograph: Victor Moriyama/AFP/Getty Images
Firefighters work to put out a blaze along the road to Jacundá national forest near the city of Porto Velho.

Photograph: Eraldo Peres/AP
An aerial view shows smoke rising over a deforested plot of the rainforest in Porto Velho.

Wildfires and burning deforested land are common during the Amazon’s dry seasons but
peaked this month to more than 26,000 – the highest August figure since 2010.

The Amazon absorbs vast amounts of carbon dioxide and is vital in the fight against climate change.
Indigenous people from the Mura tribe survey the devastation in a deforested area near Humaitá in the state of Amazonas.

Photograph: Ueslei Marcelino/Reuters

A logging truck traverses the fire-stricken road to Jacundá national forest.
An aerial view of illegally cut logs are seen in sawmills near Humaitá.

Photograph: Ueslei Marcelino/Reuters
Brazil says open to aid for Amazon fires, but will decide how it's used

Lisandra Paraguassu, Leonardo Benassatto

6 MIN READ

BRASILIA/PORTO VELHO, Brazil (Reuters) - Brazil said on Tuesday it was ready to accept foreign aid to help fight fires in the Amazon but only if it could determine how it was spent, in an apparent attempt to smooth over a public spat between the Brazilian and French presidents.

The comments by presidential spokesman Rego Barros came after governors of states in the Brazilian Amazon told President Jair Bolsonaro that they needed the money to help fight the record wildfires in the world’s largest tropical rainforest.

“The Brazilian government, through its president, is open to receiving financial support from organizations and countries. This money, when it enters the country, will have the total governance of the Brazilian people,” Barros said.

Separately, a diplomatic source in Brasilia told Reuters the Brazilian government had also accepted 10 million pounds from Britain to fight the fires. Bolsonaro’s press office was not immediately available to comment on the information.

‘Worst of wildfires still to come’ despite Brazil claiming crisis is under control

Forestry expert warns annual burning season had yet to fully play out and calls for urgent steps to reduce potential damage

Tom Phillips Latin America correspondent

Wed 28 Aug 2019 21:26 BST

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The fires raging in the Brazilian Amazon are likely to intensify over the coming weeks, a leading environmental expert has warned, despite government claims the situation had been controlled.

About 80,000 blazes have been detected in Brazil this year – more than half in the Amazon region – although on Saturday far-right president Jair
Bolsonaro claimed the situation was "returning to normal".

On Monday Brazil's defense minister, Fernando Azevedo e Silva, told reporters: "The situation is not straightforward but it's under control and already cooling down nicely."

But in an article for Brazil's O Globo newspaper on Wednesday, one prominent forestry expert warned that the country's annual burning season had yet to fully play out and called for urgent steps to reduce the potential damage.

"The worst of the fire is still to come," wrote Tasso Azevedo, a forest engineer and environmentalist who coordinates the deforestation monitoring group MapBiomas.

Azevedo said many of the areas currently being consumed by flames were stretches of Amazon rainforest that had been torn down in the months of April, May and June. But areas deforested in July and August – when government monitoring systems detected a major surge in destruction – had yet to be torched.

The Brazilian Amazon lost 1,114.8 sq km (430 sq miles) – an area equivalent to Hong Kong – in the first 26 days of August, according to preliminary data from the government's satellite monitoring agency. An area half the size of Philadelphia was reportedly lost in July, with Brazilian media denouncing an "explosion" of devastation in the Amazon.

Azevedo wrote: "What we are experiencing is a genuine crisis which could become a tragedy foretold with much larger fires than the ones we are now seeing if they are not immediately halted."

He called for urgent measures such as a crackdown on deforestation in indigenous territories and conservation units and outlawing deliberate burning in the Amazon until at least the end of October when the dry season ends.

That warning came after more than 400 members of Brazil’s environmental agency, Ibama, published a damning open letter about the state of environmental protection under Bolsonaro, a right-wing nationalist who took power in January vowing to open up the Amazon to development.

In the letter to Ibama’s president, Eduardo Bim, employees said they felt it was their duty to publicly voice their "immense concern" about the direction environment protection was taking.

"The rates of Amazon forest destruction will not be reduced unless a firm stand is taken against environmental crimes," they wrote.

Campaigners accuse Bolsonaro’s administration of hamstringing the very agency that should be fighting illegal deforestation and giving the green-light to environmental criminals with his pro-development rhetoric.

On Wednesday Reuters reported that, despite the spike in deforestation, an elite squad of Ibama operatives – called the Grupo Especializado de Fiscalização or Specialized Inspection Group – had not been deployed to the Amazon once in 2019.

At a summit of Amazon governors on Tuesday – supposedly convened to discuss responses to the fires – Bolsonaro repeatedly attacked environmentalists and indigenous activists who he claimed were holding back Brazil's economy.

Many, though not all, of the Amazon governors backed Bolsonaro’s vision for the region.

"The Amazon is still on fire but Jair Bolsonaro has managed to show he is not alone," Bernardo Mello Franco wrote in O Globo on Wednesday. "In a meeting at the presidential palace, most of the region's governors also made it clear they couldn’t give a monkey’s about the forest."

Bolsonaro confirmed on Wednesday that he would attend a meeting with other South American leaders in neighbouring Colombia on 6 September, in order to draw up a coordinated response to the crisis.

The meeting, announced on Tuesday will seek to draw up a plan to protect the Amazon rainforest, which straddles Brazil, Peru, Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia, Guyana and Suriname.

On Wednesday 18 global fashion brands including Timberland, Vans and The North Face were reported to have suspended leather purchases from Brazil over the crisis.
Brazil: fears for isolated Amazon tribes as fires erupt on protected reserves

Blazes seen on Araribóia reserve, home to Awá people

Campaigners say indigenous territories easy targets for loggers

Dom Phillips in Rio de Janeiro

Thu 29 Aug 2019 18.55 BST

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Fires have been reported in protected indigenous reserves of the Brazilian Amazon, raising fears that loggers and land grabbers have targeted these remote areas during the dramatic surge in blazes across the world’s biggest rainforest.

Blazes have been seen on the Araribóia indigenous reserve in Maranhão state – a heavily deforested reserve on the Amazon’s eastern fringes, which is home to about 80 people from an isolated group of Awá indigenous people, described by the NGO Survival International as the world’s most endangered tribe.

Brazil’s far-right president, Jair Bolsonaro, who has been widely criticised for failing to respond quickly to the crisis, issued a decree on Thursday banning fires in the Amazon for 60 days – a move environmentalists described as largely symbolic.

The fires are often used to clear pasture and deforested areas in the Amazon during dry winter months, but there have been 28,000 this month – more than any August since 2010.

Bolsonaro has been accused of helping stoke the crisis by encouraging invasions of protected reserves with his promises to develop the Amazon, and force his vision of progress on indigenous peoples.

Campaigners say indigenous territories make easy targets for loggers and farmers and settlers seeking land or valuable wood.

Tainaky Tenetehar, 34, a coordinator for the Guardians of the Forest – a volunteer indigenous force that patrols the reserve – said that the fires had been set by loggers. He said: “To make it harder, they are stopping the indigenous fire brigade from combating the fires.”

He said the fires were less severe than those in 2015, which swept the reserve and were also blamed on illegal loggers.

Images from Brazil’s space research institute INPE showed multiple fires inside the reserves in recent days – although the most recent images show they were reducing.

The fires “are being controlled so as not to put the Awá that are in the forest in danger, they need the forest to live”, Tenetehar said.

Tenehetar challenged criticisms Bolsonaro made of the size and quantity of indigenous reserves in on Tuesday during a crisis meeting.
to discuss the fires with Amazon state governors.

“There are farmers with lands bigger than ours,” he said. “We want support from other countries that are sensitive to our case. It is very important for us, because if we depend on our own country we are all dead, destroyed.”

On the other side of the Amazon, fires have broken out inside and around the Uru-Eu-Wau-Wau reserve in Rondônia state, which is home to three groups of indigenous people who, like the Awa, remain in voluntary isolation.

“That is [what] most worries us, because we don’t know what will happen with these groups,” said Ivaneide Bandeira, coordinator at Kanindé, an indigenous not-for-profit group in the state. “We have been denouncing invasions by land grabbers and deforestation since the beginning of the year.”

Fiona Watson, advocacy director at Survival International, said land grabbers are targeting indigenous reserves because they are often remote, well-conserved and unprotected, making them easy pickings.

“It’s clear to me that a lot of these fires are set off deliberately,” she said. “The difference now is that with Bolsonaro’s message, the Amazon is up for grabs.”

Giovani Tapuri, 38, an indigenous man from the Manoki tribe whose reserve is on the Amazon’s south-western edge in Mato Grosso state, said fires began appearing in his reserve in June and July. Invasions began last year but in recent months, lots have been demarcated and cattle began appearing inside their land, he said.

Last Friday he and other members of the tribe found a huge blaze on their reserve and were threatened by a group of non-indigenous men nearby. “They told us to leave,” he said. “It was tense ... we felt threatened.”

BRASILIA (Reuters) - President Jair Bolsonaro has drawn sharp criticism on the international stage from European leaders and environmental groups for his handling of wildfires raging in the Amazon, but at home few Brazilians are angered by his reluctant response.

Many of his fellow citizens share his aversion to what they see as foreign meddling in how to strike a balance between protecting and developing the Amazon rainforest. The vast region is regarded at home as a key national asset but is seen globally as a crucial bulwark against climate change.

However, opinions in Brazil may change if trade sanctions or boycotts start to weigh
on an already weak economy, politicians and analysts say.

A surge this year in the number of fires in the Amazon has sparked international outrage and protests in front of Brazilian embassies.

Environmentalists claim most of the fires were illegally set by land speculators and ranchers seeking to expand pastures in the Amazon who feel emboldened by Bolsonaro’s criticism of excessive environmental protections.

Bolsonaro has denied the fires were deliberate and repeatedly told European countries in particular not to interfere. He has threatened to turn down international aid, although Brazil needs the funds and equipment to fight the fires, and feuded with French President Emmanuel Macron.

An opinion poll this week found almost 60 percent of Brazilians considered Bolsonaro’s government to have done a great, good, or normal job, indicating they were still willing to give the president the benefit of the doubt, said Leonardo Barreto, head of Brasilia-based consultancy Capital Politico.

“Ironically, this crisis may have increased Bolsonaro’s popularity because of his nationalism grounded in the threat of losing control over the Amazon to foreigners,” said Welber Barral, a lobbyist and former Brazilian foreign trade secretary.

Many Brazilians, from across the political spectrum, believe the Amazon contains untold riches in minerals that are coveted by other nations, from gold to niobium, a strategic metal used in satellites.

This belief, long a central doctrine of Brazil’s armed forces, feeds suspicion of any role by foreigners in the Amazon, even non-governmental organizations that work to protect the environment and indigenous tribes.

However, former army captain Bolsonaro was criticized by politicians in Congress - even by some allies - for taking too long to act in tackling the fires and wasting time on the slinging match with Macron, who accused him of lying about the rate of deforestation in the Amazon.

“The government has delayed taking important decisions,” Governor Helder Barbalho of the state of Pará, site of the most intense fires, and a member of the centrist Brazilian Democratic Movement party, told Reuters.
ECONOMIC FEARS

The biggest problem facing Bolsonaro, who took the reins in January, was the lack of any solid recovery in Brazil’s economy on his watch, Barbalho said. Now the Amazon crisis had damaged Brazil’s image abroad and that could ricochet on the economy, he warned.

“If international markets close for Brazilian farm products we will be in an even more serious economic scenario,” he said.

Some countries have already threatened sanctions because of Bolsonaro’s environmental polices and consumers may decide to boycott Brazilian beef.

“That would directly affect one of Bolsonaro’s main - if not the main - electoral base, the agribusiness industry, which has backed him from the word go,” political risk analyst Barreto said.

Barreto said Bolsonaro’s administration will stand or fall on its economic record, especially an unpopular overhaul of the pension system that is winding its way through Congress.

The global outcry over the fires in the Amazon and Bolsonaro’s environmental policies could also start to influence investors.

In the first sign of a backlash, the U.S. parent company of apparel and shoe brands Timberland, Vans and the North Face said on Thursday it will no longer buy leather from Brazil due to concerns about the environment.

Companies in Europe and elsewhere could be pressed by their shareholders to stop investing in environmentally sensitive regions of Brazil, in sectors such as mining, Barral said.

That would not help growth prospects for Brazil, which economists have reduced to just 0.8% for this year.

Former center left agriculture minister Katia Abreu sees a danger of countries that are competitors in the farm sector ganging up on Brazil, using the environmental issue as a pretext.

That would turn more Brazilians against Bolsonaro, she told Reuters.
“But Bolsonaro doesn’t take advice from anyone on how to avoid crises,” she said. “He doesn’t listen. He is unpredictable.”

Corporate fallout for Brazil heats up despite signs Amazon fires may be slowing

Jake Spring, Gram Slattery
4 MIN READ

BRASILIA/RIO DE JANEIRO (Reuters) - Fires in Brazil’s Amazon rainforest have receded slightly since President Jair Bolsonaro sent in the military to help battle the blazes, but international fallout accelerated as a major shoemaker said it would not buy supplies from Brazil.

Brazil has registered 2,696 fires in the Amazon in the five days since Saturday, when the military began on-the-ground firefighting efforts, according to data from Brazil’s space research agency INPE. That is down 31% from the previous five days when 3,917 fires were registered before the military response.

The thousands of fires tearing through the Amazon have spawned an international crisis for Brazil, with public protests and world leaders voicing concern that Bolsonaro’s government is doing too little to protect the world’s largest tropical rainforest. After several days of criticism, Bolsonaro decided to send in the military to support firefighting efforts.

This year’s surge in fires, which INPE says is the worst since 2010, also raises fears of companies stepping back from Brazil amid adverse publicity surrounding the burning forest and the prospect of international sanctions.

On Thursday, the owner of shoe and apparel brands including Timberland, Vans and the North Face took the most concrete corporate move yet in response to the fires. VF Corp (VFC.N) will no longer buy Brazilian leather, it said in a statement.

VF said it would resume buying Brazilian leather when “we have the confidence and assurance that the materials used in our products do not contribute to environmental
harm in the country.”

The Greensboro, North Carolina-based company, whose other brands include Dickies, Smartwool and JanSport, said it is no longer able to assure that leather from Brazilian suppliers meets this commitment.

The company did not respond to questions regarding the value of its Brazilian leather imports or possible markets it might use for alternative supply.

According to the Center for the Brazilian Tanning Industry, the main leather trade group in Brazil, the country exported $1.44 billion of bovine leather in 2018. Its largest export markets were the United States, China and Italy, which together consumed about 60% of Brazilian leather exports in 2018.

Elsewhere, Norway has urged several of its companies to ensure they do not contribute to Amazon deforestation, including oil firm Equinor ASA (EQRN.OL), fertilizer-maker Yara International ASA (YAR.OL) and aluminum producer Norsk Hydro ASA (NHY.OL).

The fires have also led to heightened scrutiny of Brazilian agriculture, one of the country’s main economic engines.

Responding to concerns, soy crusher industry group Abiove released data it said shows that production of the oilseeds is not contributing to the fires.

The 10 towns in the Amazon reporting the most fires have only 30,000 hectares of soy planted, a negligible amount in Brazil’s overall soy trade, Abiove said. Brazil’s total planted soy area is 36 million hectares.

Still, more than half of the plantings were in the municipality of Novo Progresso in the Amazonian state of Pará. That town was the epicenter of the so-called Fire Day earlier this month which allegedly called on people to set fires to clear land for agriculture and cattle grazing - a claim prosecutors are still investigating.

Environmentalists claim that fires were set by real estate speculators and ranchers, as it is common practice to clear land for agricultural use.

Bolsonaro has insisted fires are under control and issued a decree on Thursday banning fires from being set across the country for 60 days.

On Thursday, he thanked U.S. President Donald Trump for his support in the Group of
Bolsonaro bans land-clearing fires in Amazon for 60 days

By Shasta Darlington, Florencia Trucco, Jaide Garcia and Bianca Britton, CNN

Updated 1738 GMT (0138 HKT) August 29, 2019

Brazil’s President Jair Bolsonaro has banned the use of fire to clear land throughout the country for 60 days, in response to the massive increase in blazing fires in the Amazon rainforest that has caused international outrage.

According to an official decree, which was released on Thursday morning, the ban started on Wednesday -- the day it was signed. The practice of burning land in rural areas is common among farmers, who will often use fires to clear the land for new crops or livestock.

Bolsonaro has repeatedly insisted the Amazon should be opened to development and has defunded the agencies responsible for cracking down on illegal activity.

Experts say his pro-development policies and lax regulation have led to ranchers and farmers burning the rainforest for purposes of cultivation and farming.

The ban comes after scientists warned that fires which have been raging at a record rate in Brazil’s Amazon rainforest, could strike a devastating blow to the fight against climate change.

The Amazon, which spans eight countries and covers 40% of South America, is often referred to as “the planet’s lungs” because estimates show that nearly 20% of oxygen produced by the Earth’s land comes from rainforest. The Amazon also puts an enormous amount of water into the atmosphere at a time when cities are drying up.
Despite environmentalists pointing the finger at Bolsonaro, Brazil’s populist pro-business President who is backed by Brazil’s so-called beef caucus, he has dismissed accusations of responsibility for the fires and declared last week that he would send 43,000 troops to combat the inferno.

He also announced on Wednesday that South American leaders will meet on September 6 in Colombia to discuss policy surrounding the situation in the Amazon, according to Brazilian state news agency Agencia Brasil.

According to Agence France-Presse news agency, on Thursday United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres urged the globe to do more to tackle the Amazonian fires.

“We are strongly appealing for the mobilization of resources and we have been in contact with countries to see whether, during the high-level session of the General Assembly, there could be a meeting devoted to the mobilization of support to the Amazon,” Guterres told reporters from an African development conference in Japan, according to AFP.

Guterres stressed that “until now, we have not done enough, we need to do all together more than we have done in the past,” and called the situation “very serious.”

**Number of fires in Brazil is up 85% on last year**

Number of fires detected by satellite until August 22 of each year

![Chart showing number of fires in Brazil from 2013 to 2019](chart.png)

**War of words**

Earlier this week, Brazil escalated its war of words with global powers over the Amazon fires, which number over 80,000 this year. The special communications office for Bolsonaro told CNN on Tuesday morning that Brazil would turn down the $20 million aid offer that was pledged for the Amazon at the G7 summit in France the day before.

However, just an hour later, Bolsonaro appeared to cast doubt on the matter. “Did I say that? Did I? Did Jair Bolsonaro speak?” he asked reporters outside the presidential residence.

The Brazilian President has since softened his stance on the financial aid, suggesting that he would consider the G7’s aid if Macron apologizes for accusing Bolsonaro of “lying” to him about climate commitments during trade negotiations.

The nation has also since accepted $12 million in aid from the UK government, which is a member of the G7.
The fires in the Amazon are "extraordinarily concerning" for the planet’s natural life support systems, the head of the UN’s top biodiversity body has said in a call for countries, companies and consumers to build a new relationship with nature.

Cristiana Pašca Palmer, the executive secretary of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, said the destruction of the world’s biggest rainforest was a grim reminder that a fresh approach was needed to stabilise the climate and prevent ecosystems from declining to a point of no return, with dire consequences for humanity.

"The Amazon fires make the point that we face a very serious crisis," she told the Guardian. "But it is not just the Amazon. We’re also concerned with what’s happening in other forests and ecosystems, and with the broader and rapid degradation of nature. The risk is we are moving towards the tipping points that scientists talk about that could produce cascading collapses of natural systems."

The world’s environmental crises are an increasing concern in international politics. Deforestation of the Amazon was high on the agenda of this week’s G7 meeting in Biarritz, France. In September, world leaders will gather in New York for a climate action summit. Next year, they are scheduled to get together again for a nature summit before a UN biodiversity conference in Kunming, China, in October.

Pašca Palmer said: "I am grateful that [French president Emmanuel] Macron gave biodiversity a level of attention that we haven’t seen before. I hope this is not an isolated event at a G7, but that it continues as we move forward and that it will inspire a race to the top for political leaders."

Nature needed to be at the heart of any proposed solution, she said, adding: "We cannot treat this in isolation. We cannot solve climate change without biodiversity."

For most of the past three decades, the natural world was treated almost as an afterthought by world leaders. If discussed at all, it was with platitudes about the need to save polar bears and tigers. But the collapse of pollinator populations and growing awareness of human dependence on forests and other ecosystems has started to make an impact.

This year, the world’s leading scientists warned that human civilisation was in jeopardy because forest clearance, land-use shifts, pollution and climate change had put a million species at risk of extinction.

Many environmentalists were dismissive of the $20m the G7 offered to support firefighting operations in the Amazon, but there is more optimism about the longer-term reforestation plan that France and Chile have promised to announce at next month’s climate action summit.

The UN official said the G7 fund was valuable but money was not enough. "We need to address the root causes," she said. "Even if the amount involved in extinguishing fires in rainforests was a billion or 500 million dollars, we won’t see an improvement unless more profound structural changes are taking place. We need a transformation in the way we consume and produce."

"This is not just about biodiversity conservation, it’s about finance and trade and changing the model of development. We need to put biodiversity and natural capital at the centre of the economic paradigm."
At the climate action summit in September, world leaders will be asked to raise their emissions-cutting ambitions and to explore new approaches to drawing carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere. They will discuss nature-based solutions, which covers how restoration of forests can help to stabilise the climate.

Among those who will address the summit is the Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg, who arrived in New York this week after sailing across the Atlantic on a zero-carbon racing yacht.

“Even on a boat I heard about the fires in the Amazon, the rainforest. It’s devastating,” she told a press conference on the quayside. “It’s so horrible. It’s hard to imagine. The war against nature must end.”

Earlier in the year, the teenage campaigner urged action against deforestation. “We are literally sawing off the branch we live on,” she wrote.

Several countries have recently organised massive tree-planting campaigns. Last month, Ethiopia claimed a record of 350m seedlings in a day. There have also been significant efforts in China, which has pledged to plant an area the size of Ireland every year, while the Indian state of Punjab has introduced a scheme to link gun licenses to tree planting. Scientists say tree planting has an important role to play in climate stabilisation, but protection and restoration of existing forests was essential, particularly in the tropics.

Paşca Palmer stressed the need for an integrated approach, such as the biodiversity programmes drawn up by Costa Rica and Colombia, which she hopes will lead at next year’s global meeting in Kunming to a new global framework for biodiversity. “I hope this will have a snowball effect,” she said. “It’s a growing movement. I feel that now the heads of state are embracing this, we have a good signal.”
A rash of fires in the Brazilian Amazon has caused diplomatic tensions between Brazil and several European countries and triggered protests from environmental groups around the world. Brazil’s government has pledged to stop the fires and sent in the military but denies its policies and rhetoric are responsible.

*Science* talked with remote sensing specialist Douglas Morton, one of the scientists who is closely watching the blazes. Morton heads the Biospheric Sciences Laboratory at NASA’s Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Maryland, which monitors land use and environmental changes through satellite data. Between January and late August, NASA's Terra and Aqua satellites have detected 100,000 “fire spots” in the Brazilian Amazon—the highest number in that period since 2010. The numbers are in line with those from Brazil’s National Institute for Space Research.

With partners at the University of California, Irvine, and Vrije University in Amsterdam, Morton maintains the Global Fire Emissions Database, which tracks carbon emissions and burned areas from fire activity around the world. He has also worked in the field with Brazilian colleagues since 2001, studying the forests’ vulnerability and resilience to drought, fire, and logging.

This interview has been edited for brevity and clarity.

**Q: Is there a real reason for alarm at this point, or is the world overreacting to the fires in the Amazon?**

**A:** I come to this situation with a sense of concern because this year’s patterns of deforestation and fire differ from the trajectory of the last dozen years when Brazil managed to keep deforestation at a level that’s far below the record years of the earlier part of this century. I don’t think we need to get to a point where fires and devastation grow to extreme levels to start a dialogue about what trajectory we want to be on.

**Q: Not every fire spot represents an individual fire, right? What do the satellites actually see, and how do you interpret those data?**

**A:** Essentially, what the satellite sees is an area of the planet that’s hotter than its neighbors. That thermal anomaly gets registered at the resolution of the satellite imagery—which varies depending on the instrument—and then we can use the number of thermal anomalies to compare years, using data from the same satellite sensor. A large fire will trigger many pixels in a satellite image as thermal anomalies, whereas an isolated detection may actually represent a combination of many small fires in the same location. The timing, location, and amount of energy released by the fire all provide information for scientists and fire managers.

**Q: What role does climate play? Is drought or any other climate anomaly driving the increase in fire activity?**

**A:** There are conditions this year that would make the region more vulnerable to drought, and we are on the lookout to see how those conditions will develop across the [entire] Amazon throughout the year.

**Q: But nothing out of the ordinary is happening at this point?**

**A:** The southern Amazon is dry every year, for several months, and so fires occur every year. However, we are seeing some patterns in 2019 that depart from the types of burning we’ve seen in the last decade. This year, so far, has been marked by economic drivers and increased fire activity in locations previously identified as
deforestation; whereas widespread climatic risk typically synchronizes the entire landscape and makes everything more fire prone, from pastures to standing forests.

**Q:** How can you tell fire activity is linked to deforestation? Can you see that in the satellite images or do you need eyewitnesses on the ground?

**A:** There is some information we can take directly from the satellite measurements. We know the location and duration of the fires, and the amount of energy they produce gives us an indication of what is burning. We can see smoke plumes from intense fires rising higher into the atmosphere and spreading further downwind; and we see fires that are burning in the same location for multiple days, which is only possible if they are burning wood. Fires that are burning through grasses or agricultural fields will pass quickly and do not produce as much energy. So, we can look at all these characteristics together to identify burning that's more consistent with deforestation than with other fire types.

**Q:** What's your reading of the situation, based on your remote sensing expertise and field experience in Brazil?

**A:** My sense of things right now is that the fire season got off to a higher than usual start based on an increase in pressure for land clearing, and the use of fire as part of the deforestation process. I think this is a time to be vigilant, because we are only midway through the fire season across the southern and eastern Amazon, and the challenges will grow as more and more parts of the region participate in dry season burning. At this point, a little bit of everything is burning.

**Q:** What are the economic drivers that you mentioned?

**A:** Historically, the major producers in the Amazon have been ranchers looking to produce beef and leather, and farmers seeking to expand the production of soybeans and corn. It's too early to determine what these new areas that have been cleared and burned will be used for. There are three steps in this process: We saw the increase in deforestation, now we are observing fires that are almost certainly associated with that deforestation, and in the coming months we'll be able to use satellite data to identify if these areas are planted with crops or put into pasture for ranching cattle. So, I can't tell you right now what the economic motivations are, but in 4 to 6 months we'll have a much better picture of that.
How Brazil’s nationalist leader built a bond with Trump and won his support in the Amazon fires dispute

President Trump was preparing for the Group of Seven summit in France when he learned that one of his most ardent suitors was trying to reach him. Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro needed a favor, and Trump told aides to patch the call through.

Bolsonaro got right to the point: The powerful G-7 countries, including France and Canada, were unfairly ganging up on Brazil over their criticism of his government’s response to massive fires ravaging the Amazon rainforest. Since Brazil is not a G-7 member, he told Trump, it was in danger of being “left without a voice,” according to a senior Trump administration official familiar with their call.
Trump did not hesitate. “Absolutely, we will be a voice for Brazil,” the president responded, said the official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss a private conversation.

Within days, Trump delivered as promised. French President Emmanuel Macron announced at the end of last weekend’s G-7 meetings that member nations had approved a $22 million emergency aid package to help combat the fires, but the Trump administration did not support the measure, insisting that any solution should be done in consultation with Brazil, senior White House aides said this week.

In a tweet after the summit — as Bolsonaro threatened to reject the aid money in a feud with Macron that included personal insults — Trump praised Bolsonaro for “working very hard on the Amazon fires and in all respects doing a great job for the people of Brazil.”

The episode illustrated the success Bolsonaro has had in forging a bond with Trump since sweeping to a surprise election in October behind promises to “make Brazil great again.” A far-right nationalist initially viewed as a long shot, Bolsonaro unabashedly modeled himself after Trump, weaponizing social media, bullying rivals and courting the Trump administration by promising strong support for Israel, pressure on socialist regimes in Venezuela and Cuba and newfound potential for bilateral trade.

For that, he earned a special moniker: “Trump of the tropics.”

The charm offensive has paid off with a U.S. president eager for acclamation and validation. Trump was the first foreign leader to personally congratulate Bolsonaro after his election, placing a call within an hour of the victory — after national security adviser John Bolton made clear to White House aides that Trump wanted to be the first.

Trump “likes to see himself as the leader of a movement, a global movement, and part of that is to see that the movement is spreading,” said Fernando Cutz, who served as director for Western Hemisphere affairs at the National Security Council during Trump’s first year and a half in office. Cutz said Trump grew intrigued by Bolsonaro given the comparisons between the two during Bolsonaro’s campaign.

“It helped that Bolsonaro embraced that title and did not run away from it,” Cutz said of comparisons. To Trump, “that’s a huge plus.”

Yet to congressional Democrats, the personal chemistry between the leaders represents another example of the president cozying up to a world leader with anti-democratic, strongman tendencies, sometimes at the expense of U.S. allies.

A former national legislator, Bolsonaro earned infamy with a series of bigoted, sexist and homophobic comments, as well as attacks on immigrants. He responded to a female
lawmaker who accused him of encouraging rape by saying: “I wouldn’t rape you because you don’t deserve it.”

Bolsonaro, who promised during his campaign to withdraw Brazil from the 2015 Paris climate accord, has drawn international criticism for his stewardship of the Amazon. He has fought back aggressively, denouncing foreign leaders for threatening Brazilian sovereignty and accusing his critics of starting some of the fires to make him look bad.

On Friday, Eduardo Bolsonaro, the president’s youngest son, and Brazilian Foreign Minister Ernesto Araújo visited the White House to discuss the situation with national security staff, and they gained a briefing audience with Trump.

Araújo told reporters in the West Wing driveway that Trump reiterated his belief that “it was absurd that some countries think Brazil should not have sovereignty over the Amazon in some way. We’re grateful for that stance.”

Democrats in Congress have been critical of Trump’s embrace of Bolsonaro.

“The one thing that has really drawn our attention is just how far Trump himself has been willing to bend over backward for Bolsonaro,” said one Democratic aide on Capitol Hill, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the matter frankly.

At a bipartisan Senate meeting with Brazilian Vice President Hamilton Mourão in April, according to people who were present, Sen. Robert Menendez (D-N.J.) pressed Mourão on human rights.

Democrats have also raised objections over the fact that Bolsonaro publicly endorsed Trump’s reelection during a Rose Garden news conference after their first bilateral meeting at the White House in March.

In addition to Trump, President Bolsonaro and his top aides have courted prominent U.S. conservatives, including Stephen K. Bannon, the former White House adviser who attended a small, private dinner with Bolsonaro in Washington.

Eduardo Bolsonaro, a national legislator in Brazil, also has met with White House adviser Jared Kushner, the president’s son-in-law, and with Donald Trump Jr.

One U.S. official said Eduardo Bolsonaro started meeting with administration aides before his father was elected, showing up with carefully crafted talking points, including support for Trump’s North Korea policy and echoing Trump by citing the need to overcome a “deep state” bureaucracy in Brazil.

A member of Brazil’s National Congress, Eduardo Bolsonaro is in line to be nominated by his
father as the next ambassador to Washington, a move Trump has publicly endorsed despite charges of nepotism from some Brazilian politicians.

The Bolsonaros are “completely fascinated with Trump,” said Paulo Sotero, a Latin America expert at the Wilson Center who visited Brazil this past week.

The family has indicated that they intend to “satisfy President Trump, which is what President Trump likes to hear,” Sotero said, adding that “there will be serious pushback in Brazil.”

White House aides expressed satisfaction that the two countries are drawing closer. Since Bolsonaro took office in January, he and Trump have met twice — first at the White House and again in June on the sidelines of the Group of 20 summit in Osaka, Japan.

The Trump administration has rewarded Bolsonaro by publicly supporting Brazil’s bid to join the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and elevating Brazil to the status of a major non-NATO ally — over the objections of some Democrats.

During the Rose Garden news conference in March, Trump raised the possibility of installing Brazil as a full-fledged NATO member — even though it is not eligible given that the country is not located in the North Atlantic.

Aides said Trump first broached the subject during his working lunch with Bolsonaro. Patrick Shanahan, then the acting defense secretary, had just finished briefing on security matters when Trump surprised the room by asking Bolton whether it was possible for Brazil to gain full NATO membership.

“Why not?” Trump demanded, according to multiple people who were present.

“Bolton said something like, ‘That would really turn heads,’ ” said one person who was in the room and spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss a private conversation.

“I was taken by surprise,” said Sergio Amaral, who as Brazil’s ambassador to Washington was also in the room. Amaral, who stepped down from his post in May, added in an interview: “After the lunch, there was a follow-up with some important advisers to President Trump. They assessed about how that could work because there are some restrictions.”

White House aides confirmed that they have explored the legal possibilities and floated the idea to European allies.

Republicans on Capitol Hill praised the growing partnership. An aide to Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) said that “previous administrations were not as aligned with our democratic values
as Bolsonaro is. It’s a breath of fresh air from our point of view.”

But others have viewed the relationship more skeptically. Analysts said Bolsonaro is trying to hedge against the growing influence of China — Brazil’s top trading partner — and they cautioned that achieving a trade deal with Brazil will be challenging given the country’s entrenched agricultural lobbies.

Bolsonaro has struggled to follow through on other promises that aimed to please Trump. He has backed off pledges to move Brazil’s embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and to withdraw from the Paris climate accord.

Even the increased cooperation with the United States on security and defense is a risk, said Guilherme Casarões, an international relations professor at the Getulio Vargas Foundation, a university in Sao Paulo.

“If the United States wants to embark on a military venture in Venezuela or Iran, it is very possible that they will call for Brazilian help,” he said. “Brazil’s help would not be military or strategy focused; Brazil doesn’t have many resources to contribute. But it would legitimize an American military action.”

Yet despite the policy obstacles, Bolsonaro views Trump’s success in upending the conservative movement in the United States as useful in his political goals, analysts said.

Chris Buskirk, publisher of the journal American Greatness, was among the dozen or so conservatives who, along with Bannon and Amaral, dined with Bolsonaro at the Brazilian ambassador’s residence in March. Buskirk said he marveled at the Bolsonaro team’s intimate familiarity with the debate over conservatism in the United States.

“They were looking to American conservative intellectual history as a way to figure out their next best steps,” he said.

Bannon was so impressed that he named Eduardo Bolsonaro as the chief representative in South America for his global populist organization, known as the Movement.

Matt Schlapp, chairman of the American Conservative Union, who also was present at the dinner, said he and Eduardo Bolsonaro have arranged to hold a National Conservative Political Action Committee event in Brazil in October.

“I consider him a friend,” Schlapp said. “We’ve shared ideas on the ways that the movement in each country can collaborate.” Last week, Schlapp, whose wife, Mercedes, served as the strategic communications director at the White House until departing in July, used a tweet to take Brazil’s side in the dispute with Macron over the management of
the Amazon.

Some in Brazil have raised concerns that Bolsonaro is establishing a back-channel to bypass formal diplomatic avenues to influence Trump.

But a senior Trump administration official insisted that the White House has not been lobbied by conservative outsiders and pointed out that Bolsonaro has an open line to the president.

“If they want to talk to the White House, they can do what Bolsonaro did last week — pick up the phone and call,” the official said. “We’re only a phone call away.”

*Marina Lopes in Sao Paulo contributed to this report.*
Furious locals say president is culpable over unprecedented destruction of wildlife

by Dan Collyns in La Chiquitanía

Mon 2 Sep 2019 05.00 BST

Runy Callaú can’t remember how many nights he has been fighting the blaze which has engulfed huge swathes of forest. Nor can he stop thinking about his encounter with a fleeing jaguar a few nights before.

“It was running for its life,” said the firefighter captain, peering out from under his yellow hard hat. “It was in a state of sheer terror.”

The jaguar is a feared but rarely sighted inhabitant of the Chiquitano dry forest, the unique ecosystem sandwiched between the Amazon and the Gran Chaco that has borne the brunt of weeks of fires in eastern Bolivia. At least 1.2m hectares (3m acres) have been destroyed.

All the volunteer firefighters report seeing terrified and burned animals: pacas, wild pigs, armadillos, tapirs and many bird species. On one occasion a rattlesnake climbed up Callaú’s leg before he kicked it away. “I caught my breath and realised it thought my leg was a tree,” he said. “It was just trying to get away.”

Thousands of fires swept through eastern Bolivia in August, to the fury of environmentalists and locals who accused the country’s president, Evo Morales, of incentivising the blazes after he passed legislation in July that encourages slash-and-burn farming to create pasture and arable land. Morales, who is running for a controversial fourth term of office, has refused to rescind the decree. His government says high winds and dry conditions are to blame for the worst fires in living memory.
Ignacio’s town square. He had returned with other firefighter volunteers after eight days battling the flames.

“It’s been a very hard experience because the fire nearly trapped me twice,” he said, his voice breaking. “The first thing I thought of was my family, but thank God I’m here now.”

Manacá and 14 other firefighters were dropped from helicopters into the forest more than 60 miles (100km) from the town, but soon found themselves fleeing flames that spread upward into the canopy so fast they created a fire whirl.

“It was violent, like lightning”, he said. “It felt like we were working to defend nature.” The unprecedented destruction of wildlife was also hard to stomach. Even following strict safety protocols, the men struggled psychologically, Manacá’s fire chief, Luis Andrés Roca, said.

“The stench of burned flesh was unbearable,” he said. “It’s nesting season and when the trees caught light the parrots died in their nests. My companions and I would cry, we felt so powerless. It’s the worst tragedy we’ve ever seen here.”

Global opprobrium has been focused on Brazil’s far-right president, Jair Bolsonaro, over the record number of fires raging in the Amazon, the world’s largest tropical forest. Morales, Bolivia’s leftwing leader, is now facing similar anger.

The self-proclaimed defender of Pachamama, or Mother Earth, is accused of employing the same populist policies as his Brazilian counterpart. The fires were mainly started by small farmers who used the recent legislation to open up new land to farming and cattle, his critics say.

In La Chiquitanía, a boundless region of savannah and forest, August is the month of high winds when farmers typically carry out chaqueo, the practice of burning to clear land. But never like this, said Hernán Ramos, 76, who has lived all his life in Las Taperas, a village on its eastern edge.

“There used to be just small fires, they were controlled, not like now,” he said, pacing downcast over the blackened, ash-flecked earth. “These fires have surged in a way that there was no way to control.”

The Chiquitano dry forest is the ecosystem which connects South America’s two largest biomes, the Amazon and the Gran Chaco, a dense dry forest of thorn-covered trees and scrub that extends south into Paraguay and Brazil.

With tall, papery-barked, often leafless trees, copious underbrush and daytime temperatures that reach up to 45°C, few places in the world appear more flammable. It would only take a spark to set it ablaze.

On a three-day trip through the territory renowned for its Jesuit churches dating back to the 17th century, the Guardian saw a desolate panorama of scorched forests stretching for mile after mile.

Based on satellite images from Bolivia’s early warning fire detection agency, environmental groups estimate the destruction has surpassed 2m hectares. About 16% of the damage is within protected areas and fires recently spread into Kaa-lya, Bolivia’s largest national park in the Gran Chaco.

Indigenous Chiquitano communities lost up to 98% of the forest they were working sustainably for timber and products such as copaiba oil, said María del Carmen Carreras of WWF Bolivia.
Many locals blame migrant farmers moving from Bolivia’s highlands to the tropical lowlands for spreading the fires because they don’t know how to control them.

Standing across from a wooden colonial-era church painted with frescoes, San Ignacio de Velasco’s mayor, Moises Salcés, held up his hand as he named the culprit of the disaster. “The [human] hand,” he said, shaking his head wearily. “The cause is 99% indiscriminate slashing and burning.”

“You can’t just set the prairie alight. You have to pile up the wood and brush and cut it off with stones before,” said Arnoldo “Chichi” Vaca, a wiry driver for tourists visiting the area’s Jesuit churches. “These are outsiders who started these fires.”

That perception has stoked existing racial tensions between cambas – Bolivians from the eastern lowlands – and migrant collas – mostly indigenous people from Morales’s heartland in the western highlands, who are often looking to carve out a plot of land to farm.

Roly Aguilera, the secretary general of the eastern state of Santa Cruz, said the fires had spread because there were illegal settlements in the forest that “have been promoted politically by the central government”.

When Morales visited the town of Concepción on Friday, he was assailed outside the town hall by orange-clad firefighters who demanded to know why he had not visited them to thank them. Insults where exchanged between his supporters and detractors who shouted: “Evo, murderer of nature.” His office did not respond to a request for comment.

Morales has allowed in soldiers, planes and helicopters from mostly neighbouring countries to combat the fires, and last week he ordered that no agribusiness could be established on the burnt land. On Friday, he accused unspecified groups of paying people to start the fires.

Such tensions were laid bare when protesters interrupted an event marking Bolivia’s first beef export to China last week in San Ignacio. Local media reported that as Morales sealed the first container of 96 tonnes of beef, demonstrators had chanted: “Behind every fallen tree there’s a laughing cattle rancher.”

There was no laughter on the frontlines of the battle, where volunteer firefighters worked by night to keep cooler and better see the embers. “Agua!” went up a shout as beams from volunteers’ head-lamps illuminated the swirling smoke and ash hanging in the air.

Just half an hour outside La Concepción, the fire had consumed nearly everything. Twigs had become ash that could be brushed away like the tip of a cigarette left in an ashtray. A charred log pulsed white hot inside. The smell of wood smoke hang heavy and the ground was hot underfoot.

Dozens of volunteer firefighters who had come from cities across Bolivia complained they had received little support from the government.

“Reignition fire is a major problem, that’s why we have to be so thorough,” said Junior Tejada, a volunteer who had come with his brigade from Cochabamba. Like many others, he expressed rising anger at Morales’s slowness to act, and a growing sense of suspicion that the president shared some responsibility with the firestarters.

“What we’re doing to Bolivia and the Amazon is something that can’t be fixed even if we put out the fire now,” said Olivia Mansilla, an architect who took time off her job in Santa Cruz to volunteer. “What comes next will be a holocaust for nature.”