Current Gold Mining Situation in 2020 at Canaima National Park,
A World Heritage Site in Venezuela:
Update to the 2018 Report Submitted to UNESCO

Caracas, Venezuela
March 2020
“Everyone here just wants to get rich quick,” said Hortensia Berti. This isn’t what our grandparents would have expected from us. There’s already a mine in our yard. Where will this end?”

Report from the Office of the Rapporteur of the Captaincy General Sector II Kamarata-Kanaimö / Canaima National Park / Antonio Hitcher

“They stayed at the Ara Merú Tourist Camp as tourists. That’s where they received the weapons. They hired an Angel Falls tour operator. While on the way, they tied up the motorized canoe operators and the tour guides, and then changed their route to initiate action against the indigenous people...later they received air support from a military helicopter sent to evacuate the alleged tourists. This shows that it’s an operation by the Regime directed against the indigenous peoples in order to evict them by military force and take over the only municipal district over which they have no control.”

Testimony by Carlos Peñaloza via Twitter (@AmericoDeGrazia 09-12-2018)
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Executive Summary

In the initial SOS Orinoco report, published in July of 2918, describing mining activity inside Canaima National Park (CNP), a World Heritage Site (WHS) recognized by UNESCO, the authors characterized and explained this phenomenon as being a consequence of the current Venezuelan government’s political strategy of promoting mining activity amidst an economic, social and political collapse that the regime itself has created and promoted. This document is an update of that first report, where the authors endeavored to describe what has happened in CNP and what has been the institutional response from UNESCO, IUCN and the Venezuelan government itself. This new version gives special attention to the situation of the Pemón indigenous people and demonstrates that the current situation (February of 2020) of the mining phenomenon in the CNP-WHS continues expanding rather than diminishing.

In 2018, SOS Orinoco established contact with IUCN and UNESCO and sent the report to both organizations, but received no direct response. Notwithstanding, the two organizations forwarded the document to the Venezuelan authorities, requesting a formal reply, something that is yet to materialize. Nonetheless, as a consequence of the denunciations, the Maduro regime has implemented a series of actions, some of them most unfortunate.

This present update of the report demonstrates a periodization of the mining activity that has been documented for CNP up until 2019, and characterizes the changes that have taken place in the inventory of mines since the 2018 report. There has been an intensification of mining activity during the past 19 months, with a total increase of 14% of the surface impacted within CNP, going from 501 to 574 hectares. The report has also determined the presence of other mines that had not been detected by the previous report, while not counting the number of mining rafts currently operating on the rivers, and which are more difficult to detect, and exceed 20 units, according to local sources.

This report presents a new and preliminary analysis of the environmental impact of the mining activity in CNP, taking into account present mining activity in CNP, as well as in adjacent areas, and its impact on the Kukenán and Caroní river basins, considering the ecological, biodiversity, scenic, socioeconomic and institutional contexts. It was determined that 70% of the course of the Caroní River may be at risk of contamination resulting from the use of mercury in the gold mining operations. Also, an evaluation was made of the scope of this contamination by following the diagnostic analysis of the vulnerability of the scenic landscape proposed by Markham and Sangermano (2018), taking into account the area of the mining activity adjacent to the park, consisting of 7,680 hectares in 2018. The cost distance analysis determined that mining activity outside CNP

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is creating a potential vulnerability for 22,481 hectares inside CNP, of which 7,419 show “high vulnerability” to mining activity, while 8,935 show “mid vulnerability,” and 6,127 are potentially subject to “low vulnerability.”

Furthermore, this report presents an account and an explicative analysis of the conflictive situation between the Pemón people, the Venezuelan State and criminal groups, which have been vying for control of the territory and the mining activity in CNP and its vicinity from July of 2018 until February of 2020. It also highlights how the Pemón indigenous movement and the Pemón people’s control over their own ancestral territory have been severely weakened; as well as the serious human and indigenous rights violations committed against the inhabitants of CNP and its surroundings. Finally, the report presents other impacts regarding the CNP-WHS and the Pemón people, which were detected in the field and rendered in eyewitness testimonies, and which are closely related to the events that occurred during the past year and a half, as well as the exacerbation of the complex humanitarian situation that Venezuela is experiencing, and which had not been detected in July of 2018.
1. Context

It appears that the situation in Canaima National Park, a World Heritage Site, continues to deteriorate rather than improve. We urge the reader to read our first report, published in July of 2018,\(^2\) where we characterized and explained the gold mining phenomenon inside Canaima National Park (CNP), a World Heritage Site (WHS). As that report explained, this situation is a consequence of a strategic policy of the current government of Venezuela of promoting the mining activity amidst an economic, social and political collapse that has been promoted by the government itself. Meanwhile, what has happened at Canaima National Park between July of 2018, when the initial report was published, and February of 2020? Are the dynamics and processes of the gold mining fever described in 2018 still present today? What became of the response that was supposed to come forth from UNESCO and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)\(^3\) in answer to our report, which was duly submitted to them, and of which they are well aware? The present update to the report endeavors to provide a response to these questions, with a special emphasis on the situation of the Pemón people.

1.1 Synthesis of the 2018 report (abstract of the conclusions).

- The report identified 15 mining operation areas inside CNP and 18 in its vicinity (distance \(\delta\)10 km) by means of visual interpretation of satellite imagery for the years 2017 and 2018, as received from the Landsat 8 and Sentinel sensors. In some cases, high spatial resolution images were utilized, courtesy of Radiant Earth. Nevertheless, it was not possible to detect all mining activity inside CNP for the period under analysis, especially small mines (<2 hectares) and the mining rafts found along the rivers, all of which requires detailed field work and greater temporal analysis of the satellite imagery. In this respect, it was emphasized that the mining situation may well have been worse than what was reported, which at that moment led us to suggest that there was a need to continue to delve deeper into the problem of detecting mines.

- It was determined that the mining activity in CNP has been historical and was initially centered around 4 focal points, but has expanded since the year 2000, and in a more drastic manner starting in the year 2013. The report expressed concern about two focal points: (1) Campo Carrao, the most worrisome, because of its recent appearance, and the fact that it already occupies 17 hectares inside the national park, and because of the extent of its damage to the landscape and to the indigenous communities; (2) Campo Alegre, because of its broad dimensions, occupying more than 70 hectares belonging to the park.

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\(^3\) IUCN - International Union for the Conservation of Nature, an organization that advises UNESCO regarding World Heritage Sites [https://www.iucn.org/theme/world-heritage](https://www.iucn.org/theme/world-heritage)
The gold mining activity is causing severe damage to the ecosystems (even irreversible due to the uniqueness of many of these), to the biodiversity and to the social structure of the Pemón indigenous communities that inhabit the CNP-WHS.

There are other kinds of activities and uses inside CNP that would also seem to be in a situation under little or no control, as for example, tourism, cattle raising and farming. This is leading to the proliferation of buildings, access roads that have no rhyme or reason, numbers of visitors that exceed capacities (the Roraima-Tepui), extensive slash and burn operations in the grasslands and woodlands, which makes no traditional cultural sense, as well as other impacts.

The boundaries of CNP were updated and verified, in accordance with what is established in Decree No. 1.137, relating to the park’s expansion, with the use of high definition imagery that was made available for the analysis, and it was then determined that the surface area of CNP consists of 2,790,351.28 hectares, rather than the 3,000,000 hectares reported in official government documents.

1.2 The reach of the 2018 findings and UNESCO’s position

In 2018, SOS Orinoco established contact with officials of the IUNC, specifically the IUCN World Heritage Programme, and they recommended that we send our Canaima report to the executive boards of IUCN, the IUCN World Heritage Programme⁴ and to the UNESCO World Heritage Center.⁵ We never received a direct response from the leadership of these organizations, but we did discover through government officials in Venezuela that the SOS Orinoco report had been shared with the Venezuelan authorities, specifically with Venezuela’s Foreign Ministry, and that UNESCO had asked the Venezuelan government to issue a formal response to the SOS Orinoco report before 4 February 2019. We have discovered through conversations with personnel at IUCN and the UNESCO WHC that such response from the Maduro government has not arrived. Some of the Maduro regime’s reactions that we evaluated are a consequence of our denunciation, and based on the regime’s reactions, we have been able to determine the following:

October 2018: Admiral in Chief Remigio Ceballos announced by Twitter that he had met with the Joint Chiefs of Staff to plan “articulated operations with the indigenous communities of the state of Bolivar, in order to protect Canaima National Park from environmental predators that attempt against humanity.”

A response from the Council of Chieftains of the Pemón People⁶ presented at the meeting called by Aloha Núñez, Minister of the People’s Power for Indigenous Peoples, which was attended by the cabinet ministers assigned to the Mining

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Portfolio, as well as by the Operational Strategic Command of the Bolivarian National Armed Force (CEOFANB). The purpose was to address the matter of the denunciation presented “by third parties” to UNESCO concerning mining activity along the Carrao River (CNP).

- 8 December 2018: the Maduro government decided to demonstrate its feigned commitment to abolish illegal mining by launching an “operation” carried out by personnel of the National Armed Force and the General Office of Military Counterintelligence (DG CIM), who disguised themselves as tourists, and which resulted in one death and several wounded among members of the Pemón community. (See SOS Orinoco blog).  

- Since March of 2018, SOS Orinoco has been in communication with personnel at IUCN and UNESCO. They have suggested to us that we maintain such communication and send updates concerning the situation inside Canaima NP.

2. Mining Activity in Canaima

2.1 Mining activity documented as of this date (March 2020)

The following chart demonstrates a periodization of the stages of mining activity in Canaima National Park: (a) prior to the year 2000 (when mining activity was focused mainly on diamonds), (b) after the year 2000 (reappearance and a new trend promoting mining activity at old mining sites), and (c) starting in 2013 (acceleration of mining activity throughout all of CNP and its adjacencies, as well as a continuation of the reopening of old mining sites).

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Figure 1. Chronology for mining sites inside CNP mentioned in technical reports, denunciations in the news media and other open sources
2.2 Changes in the inventory of mines since the 2018 report

As of this date, information gathered from various sources, such as remote detection, a review of the bibliography and local eyewitness reports, indicates that mining activity has intensified during the past 19 months, and that there are other mines aside from those detected in the initial report, bearing in mind that it is difficult to detect mining activity that is conducted along the rivers using mining rafts, as well as mining activity that takes place in open areas covering less than 2 hectares, or is hidden by the cloud cover at the moment the available satellite imagery is captured.

With the goal of determining whether the 15 mining sites identified in the initial report had expanded, a temporal comparison was made by means of a visual interpretation of high spatial resolution satellite imagery (Sentinel, 10 m) within the following temporal window: T1 mosaic of images of CNP from late 2017 and early 2018, T2 mosaic of images from late 2019. Upon completion of the analysis it was observed that only 2 showed an increase of greater than 50% of the area initially quantified, going from 2 hectares to 7 hectares at Kuana and from 9 to 16 hectares on the lower Amac River. Most of the sites showed no expansion, yet remained active, as evidenced by the presence of settling ponds characteristic of recent activity, while at other sites the change was from 1 to 2 hectares, also was detected a site near Campo Alegre that was omitted before because of the poor image visibility, which means that the total surface affected by mining activity inside CNP, on the area previous detected is now 574 hectares (Table 1).

Table 1. Changes in the surface area covered by some of the mines identified in the 2018 report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>Y</th>
<th>2018 Area (hectares)</th>
<th>2019 Area (hectares)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Campo Alegre</td>
<td>699338</td>
<td>544957</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Acareden</td>
<td>653679</td>
<td>531003</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Río Amac Abajo</td>
<td>631402</td>
<td>536552</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Río Apremé</td>
<td>573747</td>
<td>525721</td>
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<td>36</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
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<td>563849</td>
<td>738306</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Asapati</td>
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<td>638164</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Río Karrao_1</td>
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<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Río Karrao_2</td>
<td>574486</td>
<td>660259</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Wadetey</td>
<td>584654</td>
<td>658934</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Kuana</td>
<td>578012</td>
<td>651302</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Mowak</td>
<td>637198</td>
<td>605402</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Campo Alegre has an extension of 53 hectares because was possible to detected a gold mining that previous existed but, was omitted before because of the poor image visibility.
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Figure 2. Location of Canaima National Park in the context of Venezuela’s Amazonian Region and mines detected inside the park

Figure 3. Temporal comparison of mining operation at Asapati
2.3 The Campo Alegre - Apoipó Mining Complex

The method we are using for defining the boundaries of the mining sites is rather conservative, as we have drawn the boundaries as tightly as possible around the areas where the operations are having a direct impact, in order to minimize differences of interpretation. Nevertheless, upon observing in detail the impacted area at large mining sites, such as Campo Alegre, it is possible to identify not only the area of the geological stratum or soil that has been removed by the mining operations, but also the associated roadways, the layout of the facilities and the deforested spaces closest to these impacts. The location of this mining complex at Campo Alegre-Apoipó, as well as the letters used to designate the mines, is shown in figures 4, 5 and 6. One can see that three mines are located on the edge or boundary of CNP, but outside of the park, alongside the left bank of the Caroní River, and that the two larger ones are located inside CNP, on the right bank of the Caroní River. These two mines are designated as “A” and “B” in Figure 6.

![Figure 4. Location of the Campo Alegre-Apoipó mining complex with respect to the rest of Canaima National Park](image-url)
Interpretation of the data shows that the integral impact at Mine A (on the far right in Figure 6 below) has a surface area of 167 hectares, while that of Mine B (on the far left) covers 126 hectares, for a total of 293 hectares. In this respect, the total surface area of CNP being subjected to mining activity is approximately 732 hectares. For more details, please refer to the videos we have published on YouTube:

- https://youtu.be/Qr84QcapjSI
- https://youtu.be/1v9lmzDYuEs
- https://youtu.be/dcOEKgzzKtGk
The mining operations at the Campo Alegre-Apoipó complex (A, B, C, D and E) have resulted in the destruction of 375 hectares, 293 of which are inside the national park. All of this mining activity began under the Chávez-Maduro regime and continues to expand. Mine A, at Campo Alegre, where there is evidence of mechanized methods, has resulted in the establishment of a Pemón village that includes an outpatient clinic, a school and houses made of concrete. This mine and village complex, located inside Canaima National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, occupies a space equivalent to 220 soccer fields. Mine B shows a pattern of “aerial bombardment,” resulting from the use of mechanized methods. This entire operation has required large amounts of capital investment and logistical expenditures, and depends on fuel that is supplied and controlled by the Bolivarian National Armed Force. Mine B has destroyed ecosystems equivalent to 166 soccer fields at this World Heritage Site.

It is inconceivable and impossible to believe that the Venezuelan authorities are unaware of the presence of these mines, which are easily accessible by land and clearly visible from the air. Furthermore, it is a virtual crime that the authorities have not shut them down. All of the region's inhabitants are aware of these mines, which are being worked mainly by members of the Pemón communities. The fact that these mines operate with total impunity, while receiving supplies from the Bolivarian National Armed Force, and with the complicity of authorities at the national, regional and local levels, does not in any way lend credibility to the Venezuelan state.

2.4 Preliminary analysis of the environmental impact on CNP

One of the main concerns regarding the mining activity is that its effect is not limited to the surface area directly affected by the mining operations (the removal of the
substratum and the creation of craters and settling ponds), but also shows a large amount of collateral damage inherent in the establishment and operation of the mines: roadways, deforestation (elimination of woody vegetation), changes in drainage patterns, loss of soil at distances away from the site (by erosion, landslides), sedimentation and contamination of bodies of water, loss of original vegetation cover (non-woody), establishment of dwellings, storage buildings, machinery yards, landing strips, etc. Not to mention the loss hunting game and social impacts. This means that everything that impacts the Kukenán and Caroní river basins will affect not only the national park but also Guri Dam, especially its reservoir, thus affecting the life cycle and operation of this electric power generation system that is vital for all of Venezuela.⁸

In order to safeguard Guri Dam, the government created the Zone for Protecting the South of the State of Bolivar (Decree 942 of 27 May 1975 and Decree 1742 of 23 July 1991), which consists of more than 7 million hectares, that is to say 30.5% of the state of Bolívar. This Zone lends protection to the basins of the Caroní and Paragua rivers, the upper Caura River and the mid region of the Aro River basin; as well as the vast wealth of landscapes and species. This legislation states the need to guarantee the potential use of the Caroní River, given that it is the main source of water for Guri Dam and other hydroelectric dams downstream from there.⁹ The sediments in the rivers affected by the mining activities accumulate mostly at the entrance to the dam’s reservoir, known as the “head” of Guri Dam, thus preventing a greater flow of water to enter, which places the dam’s operations at risk.¹⁰ Furthermore, the transported sediments are rich in quartzite and sandstone particles that make up the soil in that region,¹¹ and their abrasive characteristics pose a high potential for eroding the blades and other components of the turbines that generate the electric power.

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¹¹ Scurra et al. Dezzeo, 1994 y Huber 1997
Table 2. List of environmental impacts. Source: Table from 2018 report, modified and updated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Settings</th>
<th>Impacts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ecological</strong></td>
<td>Destruction of the soil.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Destruction of the vegetation cover.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Creation of bodies of water where disease-carrying insects proliferate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sedimentation in natural bodies of water.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Severe alteration of physiochemical parameters of the waters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alteration of river plankton and nekton communities.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Alteration of river benthonic communities</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Destruction of lentic natural bodies of water (lakes, backwaters, and</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>bayou-like bodies of water).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alteration of river morphodynamics. Removal or alteration of riverbeds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chemical contamination of bodies of water, by mercury and human waste.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased deforestation of adjacent areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increase of brush and forest fires.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Biodiversity</strong></td>
<td>Extinction of hunted and non-hunted animals.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Depletion of native plant communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Landscape</strong></td>
<td>Damage and degradation of the landscape.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Socioeconomic</strong></td>
<td>Confrontations among the citizenry and increased crime.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Degradation of tourist attractions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Breakdown in services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Economic diversification at a minimum.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased human migrations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>An increase in the number and frequency of outbreaks of endemic diseases.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emergence of new diseases.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institutional</strong></td>
<td>Adequate and efficient environmental management have become impossible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased corruption and influence peddling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased conflicts among institutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diminished responsibility and accountability.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Loss of credibility in the eyes of society.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Being aware of the environmental deterioration that is taking place in areas surrounding the mining operations, and mindful of the need for environmental planning and conservation actions for the reclamation of our natural heritage, we proceeded with an initial approach for calculating the most vulnerable part of the park.

The first thing to bear in mind for future actions is that 70% of the course of the Caroní River, the second largest waterway in Venezuela, and one of prime importance for the generation of hydroelectric energy, may be at risk of contamination as a result of the mercury utilized in mining operations in the isolation of gold by means of the amalgamation process. Why do we refer to 70% of the course of the Caroní? It is estimated that the effects from the mercury that is swept away and later accumulated in the bodies of water may reach distances as far as 200 km (125 miles) away from the site where the mercury is being used (Figure 7).
Since 1989, many studies have been conducted concerning the contamination of the waters in the state of Bolívar. *Litus el Plexus el Minproc*, a report by the Central University of Venezuela (UCV), the Venezuelan Institute for Scientific Research (IVIC), the Ministry of Health, the Research University of Puerto Ordaz and the central laboratory of the National Guard (1995), mentions that the inorganic mercury, used in the amalgamation process for isolating the gold, becomes dispersed in the soil, where it is transformed into organic mercury (methyl mercury) as it reacts with bacteria, fungi and acid waters with a pH ranging between 3 and 4, which is characteristic of the Guiana Shield. In its conclusions, the partial report from the central laboratory of the National Guard states: “The environmental contamination created by humans is very harmful to the environment, because the metallic mercury is quickly metabolized by the bacteria and algae in the
plankton into organic mercury (ethyl mercury or methyl mercury), which becomes concentrated in the fish by way of the food chain.”

**Table 3. Surface area of mining activity at sites adjacent to Canaima National Park**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mining Area</th>
<th>Hectares</th>
<th>Mining Area</th>
<th>Hectares</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mosquito River_h</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>San Salvador de Paúl_n</td>
<td>880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Pedro de Kukenan_b</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Urai</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apoipo_b</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>Yacrimá</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicanan Headwaters_a</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>Boquini 2_a</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campo Alegre_F_b</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Campo Alegre</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicharrón 2_d</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Chibay</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guacharaca 2_b</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Chicharrón</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Las Claritas_10</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>Las Claritas</td>
<td>4368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monte Bello F_b</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>El Palaco and El Valle</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pempa</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Salva la Patria Creek</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Amac River_c</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Upper Amac River</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pirma River 2_h</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Apremé River</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surucún River_c</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>Urimán</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Luis de Kukenán_b</td>
<td>46</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>7680</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another important element for evaluating the reach of the mercury contamination, in a preliminary way, is the landscape, given that, according to the geomorphology and the typology of the soil and vegetation, some of the park’s areas may be somewhat vulnerable to the deposition of this heavy metal, and therefore more prone to undergoing changes in the chemical properties of the soil, as well as in the conservation status of the plant and animal communities as a result of the bio-accumulation. In this respect, we followed the landscape vulnerability diagnostic analysis proposed by Markham and Sangermano (2018), which addresses only 3 variables: terrain elevation, soil permeability and distance away from the mines. In order to conduct an analysis that was as complete as possible, we proceeded to measure the area of the mining activity in the vicinity of the park, based on the mining sites identified in the 2018 report, all of which added up to 7,680 hectares (Table 3 and Figure 8).

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The “cost distance analysis” consists of performing a weighted measure of the work necessary for transporting a mass between two points in the area under observation, in this case Canaima National Park and its adjacent areas, taking into account that it takes more work to transport a mass through a mining area, and that there is a matrix of resistance or impediment. The matrix of impediment was developed by beginning with: (1) the raster format of the surface layer, based on the terrain elevation model (STRM 30 available free of charge from the United States Geological Survey), and modifying the values based on the assumption that as altitude decreases (going downstream) the amount of mercury being swept away and accumulated increases; we then utilized: (2) an officially defined layer (Ministry of the Environment 2014 database) pertaining to soil use capacity, by analogy with soil permeability as utilized by Markham and Sangermo, given that their model takes into account not only permeability but also the potential use of the terrain, in our case the uses are for areas catalogued for conservation and are the most vulnerable to impacts from mining activity.

Taking the mines as the starting point, and utilizing the elevation/use capacity resistance matrix, we ran an automated computerized model through the ArcGis 10.2 spatial analysis program, known as COST-DISTANCE. The results yielded a matrix with
different weightings related to the vulnerability to mercury contamination associated with mining activity (Figure 9).

The results of the analysis indicate that: a) 7,419 hectares of CNP’s surface show “high vulnerability” to mining activity, and the vegetation unit having the greatest surface area that is potentially vulnerable is that of the “Submesothermal Ombrophile Forest” (SOF); b) 8,935 hectares of CNP’s surface show “medium vulnerability,” again the most vulnerable are the SOF’s with 4,360 hectares; c) 6,127 hectares of CNP’s surface are potentially subject to “low vulnerability,” and here the vegetation unit with the greatest vulnerability is the “Submesothermal Ombrophile Shrubland and Savanna.” This means that the 7,679 hectares of mining activity outside CNP have the potential to make 22,481 hectares inside CNP vulnerable (Figure 9).

Finally, one can see the CNP-WHS is being encroached upon along its boundaries; most of the mining activity is concentrated in the Caroní River basin, along CNP’s southern and western boundaries, starting at Ikabarú, which does not appear on the map since it is located more than 10 km from the park, and along different tributaries of the Caroní River, namely the Apremé, Urimán, Apoipó and Kukenán rivers (see Figures 8 and 9). To the north, the mining activity is concentrated along the tributaries of the Cuyuní River, namely the Supamo, Yuruán and Chanán rivers, in the mining area of Las Claritas and Chibay (see Figures 5 and 6), and accounts for the encroachment of mines from the north. This leads us to ask ourselves: to what extent can CNP’s boundaries serve to fend off this encroachment by the mining activities? It is necessary to take measures to restrain the mining activity that is being sustained by operations centers at Las Claritas, El Manteco, La Paragua, Ikabarú and Santa Elena de Uaíren, given that continued mining activity at these focal points will result in greater vulnerability for Canaima National Park.
Figure 9. Cost Distance Analysis of the landscape’s vulnerability to mercury contamination
3. Events occurring between July of 2018 and February of 2020

3.1. Background

The Council of Chieftains General of the Pemón People and the Pemón Territorial Guard

The Council of Chieftains General of the Pemón People (CCGPP) is a body of traditional authorities created in 2013, unifying sectors 2, 3, 5, 6, 7 and 8 of Gran Sabana municipal district. It arose out of a need to have a body to serve as an alternative to the Indigenous Federation of the State of Bolívar (FIEB), established in 1972. The FIEB has been unconditionally loyalty to the “revolutionary process” and to the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), and is partial to the regime. The CCGPP was created as a result of the communities’ displeasure toward the FIEB’s failure to respond to several events that were marked by violence, where the intent was to gain control of the gold mines that were being worked by the Pemón people. The CCGPP was created to defend the “rights” of the Pemón people and their territory, with a clear orientation in favor of having the mining activity be conducted by the indigenous people themselves, on their own lands.\(^\text{13}\)

The encroachment by armed criminal gangs and the Criollo\(^\text{14}\) invasion of Pemón territory, as well as the threats and the assassination of indigenous leaders, and an increase in robberies, intimidation and harassment directed against the communities led them to create the Pemón Territorial Guard (GTP) in 2016. This group for “the defense and control of the territory” began to act under the supervision of the CCGPP, in conjunction with government security forces. Indigenous leader Lisa Henrito stated: “As Pemón people, we are not going to allow armed groups to enter into our territory, and we are not going to allow ourselves to be subjugated by them, no matter where they come from, regardless of whether it’s people from the government, business people, professionals or from among other corrupt brothers.”\(^\text{15}\)

CCGPP norms relating to mining operations in the Caroní River basin

In order to establish a set of norms governing mining operations in the Caroní River basin, the CCGPP convened an assembly in November of 2016, where the following points were agreed upon:

1) To suspend the extraction of gold from the alluvial deposits by the use of mining rafts along the course of the rivers at Urimán, Ikabarú, Wonkén, Santa Elena de Uairén, Kavanayén and Kamarata in Gran Sabana municipal district, considered to be the ancestral territory of the Pemón People, and to establish mining sites in areas that do not affect the Caroní River basin.

\(^\text{14}\) Criollos are Venezuelan people of Hispanic cultural and linguistic heritage, and who are not identified, by themselves or by others, as being “indigenous.”
2) Mining sites are to be located at distances ranging from 500 to 1,000 meters away from the Caroni River and its tributaries, and mining operations shall be permitted only if the work is done exclusively by Pemón indigenous people, including *Mestizos* (children whose mother or father is a Pemón), and they are required to present a project for the reclamation of areas that have been affected, and must dedicate at least three days out of the month for restoration tasks.

3) Every community must implement a system of plant nurseries as part of a plan to reclaim affected areas and to foster environmental education for the school children.

4) Intensification of actions by the Territorial Security Corps so as to prevent entry by outsiders who have criminal records, drink alcohol excessively, use drugs, or intend to purchase gold with money derived from drug trafficking.

5) Identify and sanction chieftains, and indigenous persons in general, who associate themselves with organized crime for the purpose of trafficking in weapons or drugs.

6) Non-indigenous persons may enter only if they “make a living” in the villages of Ikabarú, El Polaco and El Paují, “and who have legally settled into the demarcated and protected indigenous zone, and are therefore permitted to live there together with others under regulations established by the indigenous communities.”

At the meeting, it was also decided “to consider the situation of small-scale mining operations inside the National Park (...) in search of a solution to this set of problems.” In addition, they devised a resolution directed to the National Executive petitioning for the search of solutions to the conditions of the indigenous communities located in the Caroní River basin, the elimination of the designation of the Ikabarú Special Bloc as part of the Orinoco Mining Arc, and the renewal of the process of demarcation of indigenous lands and habitat in order to “accelerate the processes for the allocation of titles.”

Even though these measures were agreed to at an assembly having broad participation by the Pemón people from the Caroni River basin, it appears that they have not been respected, given that mining activities continue in the area and there is no evidence of changes having taken place in mining practices, such as those suggested in the adopted norms.

3.2. Events

**The Pemón indigenous community of San Luis Morichal comes under siege**

On 13 March 2018, Oscar Meya was kidnapped and tortured. He is a Pemón from San Luis de Morichal (near kilometer marker 88 and the village of Las Claritas), in Sifontes municipal district, in the state of Bolívar. According to a communiqué from the CCGPP, Oscar Meya was kidnapped by members of the “syndicate” that operates in the area, and who had accused him of “having supported the military during operations directed

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_17_ Outside the boundaries of Canaima National Park.
against them, the miners.” A week later, the CCGPP confirmed that Oscar Meya had been murdered by the members of the “syndicate,” who were refusing to deliver the body. This criminal group was also blamed for the murder of Domingo Cabrera, a resident of the same community, which occurred on 30 July 2017.18

Political organizations, environmentalists and defenders of the rights of indigenous peoples denounced acts committed by armed groups seeking to control the territory in order to set up mining operations. These armed groups have been increasing since the creation of the Orinoco Mining Arc. Their reports state that the withdrawal of the State “sets up a scenario of violence, criminality and violation of human rights, a place where might makes right.”19

According to a communiqué from the CCGPP, these actions are a part of an attempt to “purge” mining operations, aimed at turning them over to transnational mining companies, with full support from the highest levels of the government.20 Jorge Gómez, the High Chieftain of the CCGPP, reported that his organization had requested an urgent meeting with various ministers of the national government in order to address the situation, but received no reply. Likewise, he denounced the government’s complicity, making special reference to Justo Noguera Pietri, governor of the state of Bolívar.21

Beginning in early May of 2018, the community of San Luis de Morichal became isolated and its inhabitants were placed in a situation of “sequestration,” unable to move about because the mining syndicates had closed off all means of access by road or by water. Starting in late March, this became a reprisal against a community that had dared to protest by closing off highways and making public statements. The members of the community denounced: “The harassment directed against our communities by these criminal gangs is relentless and there is no response from any of the authorities”.22

In early June of 2018, Juvencio Gómez, a Pemón leader from Gran Sabana municipal district, reported the murder of five more indigenous individuals in the community of San Luis de Morichal. Américo De Grazia, a member of the National Assembly representing the state of Bolívar, reported that the murders had been committed by members of the National Liberation Army (ELN), a Colombian guerrilla force, and demanded that Defense

Minister Vladimir Padrino López remove these irregular groups, and accused him of “rendering invisible the ELN’s occupation of our territory”.23

Agreements between the national government and the Pemón leadership regarding the regulation of mining operations in Canaima National Park

During the months of August and October 2018, meetings were held between the FANB, the national government and representatives from the Pemón communities for the purpose of addressing the illegal mining situation inside CNP. The government’s “decision” was to reaffirm that mining operations in CNP are prohibited and non-negotiable, “for which it deployed a civic-military plan for curtailing and eradicating any mining operations conducted inside (...) Canaima National Park.”24 As for their part, the indigenous leaders presented several proposals for defending their ancestral rights and for protecting the environment in areas where there was mining activity, securing their territory, conserving nature and protecting their communities. However, they did not provide any information regarding a plan showing concrete actions, expected results, indicators of success or a timeline for execution of any plans.25

The assassination of José Vásquez, Chief of the Pemón Territorial Guard

On 26 September 2018, José Vásquez, a Pemón leader who commanded the GTP, was assassinated. According to testimonies gathered by Provea, the GTP had succeeded in reducing crime within the Pemón territory, a result of the GTP having expelled the mafias, as well as members of the State of Bolívar Police, because they had been accomplices of the criminal groups. Vásquez had received death threats, and was being watched and followed by various government and military security forces (DGCIM, REDI and ZODI). A communiqué from the CCGPP reported that the murder of Vásquez had taken place at the Guaiacaipuro Command Center, in the community of Turasén, allegedly at the hands of a non-indigenous individual, a former member of the FANB that was working as a bodyguard.26

DGCIM operation at Canaima - the Tepui Protector Plan

On 8 December 2018, soldiers of the General Office of Military Counterintelligence (DGCIM) carried out an armed incursion into CNP in which Charly Peñaloza, a young

member of the Pemón community was murdered and three other Pemón individuals wounded. On the following day, these military forces closed off all access and committed acts of violence and harassment against the community of Canaima. These actions occurred as part of the Tepui Protector Plan, which was an alleged attempt to counteract illegal mining inside PNC.27

In response to the military attack, members of the Canaima community attacked the camp belonging to Corpoelec,28 burned fuel storage tanks and closed off the airport’s runway.29 This indigenous people’s mobilization spread to the rest of the Gran Sabana and cut off traffic on Troncal 10, the main highway leading to Brazil, and led to a general strike and the takeover of the airport at Santa Elena de Uairén.30 This situation made it necessary to suspend the municipal elections that were scheduled to be held on Sunday, 9 December 2018.31

The military personnel that participated in organizing the Tepui Protector Plan had stayed at the Ara Merú Lodge, a luxurious facility located inside CNP, which in fact had been built illegally. The hotel reportedly belongs to businessman César Leonel Días González, who is associated with several tourism companies in the state of Bolívar that had received the approval of governmental ministries and regional authorities. On 16 August 2019, a warrant was issued for the arrest and extradition of this businessman for illegal gold trafficking. His alleged modus operandi included the use of his hotel infrastructure as a façade for controlling the distribution of equipment for the mining operations, supervising the mines, safeguarding the gold shipments, and coordinating flights by the light “tourist” aircraft used for smuggling the gold to islands in the Caribbean.32

According to Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino López, the military operation was carried out in order to prevent criminal gangs engaged in illegal mining operations from continuing to do so in CNP. The actions unfolded in the Arenales sector of the Carrao River, where several mining rafts were destroyed and where armed mining gangs were confronted. In his statements, he emphasized, “We are not going to allow this ecocide to continue in Canaima Park or beyond.”33 However, the defense minister did not provide any information concerning the number of mining rafts that had been destroyed, or the number of miners that had been arrested, nor anything about developments in investigations

28Corpoelec is the government-owned electric power monopoly.
30Quiénes son los pemones y cómo viven en rebeldía contra el gobierno de Nicolás Maduro en una de las zonas más remotas de Venezuela. (Accessed on 12 FEB 2020) https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-46690716
31Indígenas de la Gran Sabana de defienden a muerte de los ataques del Régimen. (Accessed on 12 FEB 2020) https://evtvmiami.com/indigenas-de-la-gran-sabana-de-defienden-a-muerte-de-los-ataques-del-regimen/
concerning financial backers, suppliers, mining raft operators, or gold shippers. The CCGPP lay blame on the state for the murder of Charly Peñaloza, and made clear that there had been no confrontation and that none of the wounded or the murdered indigenous individual were carrying any firearms.34

On 12 December 2018, Nicolás Maduro categorized the illegal mining operations in Canaima as being a case of ecocide and ratified its prohibition inside the National Park. He accused the indigenous population of being part of the mining mafias led by “rightwing politicians,” mentioning Andrés Velásquez and Américo de Grazia. He also ordered the general in charge of the Integral Defense Strategic Region (REDI) to guarantee the stability and environmental protection of the state of Bolívar.35

In the opinion of Américo De Grazia, a member of the National Assembly, the events at Canaima were “an operation by the Regime directed against the indigenous peoples in order to evict them by military force and take over the only municipal district over which they have no control”.36 According to various members of the Canaima community interviewed by the BBC, these events are related to the Venezuelan state’s quest to gain control of the mining operations. Here are three examples of their testimony: (1) “We’ve never gone through a situation as difficult as this before, and that’s what draws us to the mine.” (2) “The government is the one that’s forcing us to go to the mines. We’re not doing this because we want to; we’re doing it out of necessity. They accuse us of selling gold outside the country, when in fact it’s the government we’re selling it to. What they want is to have sole command here so that they can be the ones in charge.” (3) “We’re giving up our lives for the sake of our people. If there should be another incursion into our territory and against our people, rest assured that we won’t let that stand. Either they kill us, or we’ll kill them using their own weapons”.37

Military aggression amidst the arrival of humanitarian aid

In early 2019, the political tension, the climate of violence and the general protests escalated as a consequence of the complex humanitarian crisis that Venezuela has been experiencing since 2015,38 which was further exacerbated by the presidential crisis that began on 10 January 2019 when Nicolás Maduro was sworn in for a second presidential term, but was declared to be an illegitimate usurper by the National Assembly (the legislative branch of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) and by the Organization of

36 Indígenas de la Gran Sabana de defienden a muerte de los ataques del Régimen. (Accessed on 24 FEB 2020) https://evtvmiami.com/indigenas-de-la-gran-sabana-de-defienden-a-muerte-de-los-ataques-del-regimen/
37 Quiénes son los pemones y cómo viven en rebeldía contra el gobierno de Nicolás Maduro en una de las zonas más remotas de Venezuela. (Accessed on 12 FEB 2020) https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-46690716
American States (OAS), followed by the National Assembly’s designation of Juan Guaidó as Interim President, which was recognized by the OAS and approximately 60 countries.\(^{39}\)

Guaidó prioritized the acceptance of humanitarian aid for Venezuela and began negotiations with several countries that support him. Meanwhile, Maduro continued to deny the existence of a humanitarian crisis in Venezuela and refused to request any humanitarian aid as he considered that to be an excuse by others for justifying foreign military intervention. By 23 February 2019, the aid sent by the United States, which remained in storage in Brazilian and Colombian border towns, was supposed to enter into Venezuela. The Maduro government considered this to be a plot to overthrow him. Meanwhile, Guaidó issued an ultimatum to Venezuela’s Armed Forces to allow the aid to enter.\(^{40}\)

On 20 February 2019, the CCGPP issued a communiqué ratifying its good working relations with the National Executive, stating its decision to maintain an impartial position with respect to the country’s situation, and further stating that those who support the entry of humanitarian aid may do so only of their own accord, but not on behalf of the Pemón people. In this respect, they split away from the mayor of Gran Sabana and the chieftains of Manakrú (Sector 6 Santa Elena) and Kumaracapay (Sector 5 Kawanayén), and made it clear that the GTP was not authorized to participate in activities they considered to be partisan politics. This communiqué revealed a breach in the Pemón indigenous movement with respect to the country’s political and humanitarian situation, and served as a letter of endorsement for the actions taken by the FANB against the indigenous people, knowing that there would be no support from the GTP by order of the chieftains general.\(^{41}\)

On 22 February 2019, at the Pemón community of Kumaracapay (San Francisco de Yuruani), there was a confrontation between FANB troops and members of the community. The FANB soldiers being transported along Troncal 10 (the main highway) in a convoy, consisting of anti-riot vehicles, that was headed south toward the Brazilian border to prevent entry of the humanitarian aid, which was scheduled for the following day. The Pemón members of Kumaracapay community attempted to block passage of the convoy, because they were in favor of allowing the aid to enter the country. The soldiers opened fire on the village people, resulting in the death of Zoraida Rodríguez and 14 people wounded by the gunfire. The repression against the community continued during the following days, with illegal searches and arrests being conducted by the SEBIN (the political police), thus forcing the community to flee into the jungle.\(^{42}\)

On 23 February 2019, the repression spread toward Santa Elena de Uairén and the Pemón communities near the border with Brazil, where there were strong confrontations


\(^{40}\)Idem.


between indigenous people in favor of allowing the humanitarian aid to enter the country and members of the FANB, the Bolivarian National Police, and other security forces, as well as irregular groups of armed civilians aligned with the regime and known as the colectivos. That day three people were killed by gunfire, and at least 32 suffered gunshot wounds.\textsuperscript{43}

As a result of the confrontations, repression and persecution in the area, seven people were killed, 57 were wounded by gunfire (22 of whom were Pemón), 62 were arrested arbitrarily (23 of whom were indigenous individuals) and hundreds of indigenous people found it necessary to flee to Brazil in search of protection, medical attention and food.\textsuperscript{44} Several CCGPP leaders, plus Emilio González, the Pemón mayor of Gran Sabana municipal district, and other indigenous leaders took refuge in Brazil in search of protection from the political persecution. The CCGPP and the GTP fell apart, the Gran Sabana was militarized, and the Pemón mayor was replaced by José Alejandro Barreto, who belongs to the Tupamaro Revolutionary Movement, which is associated with irregular violent groups partial to Maduro’s revolutionary government.\textsuperscript{45} Up until that moment, Gran Sabana municipal district had been the only one in the state of Bolívar with a mayor from the political opposition. The number of deaths resulting from these actions continues to be a matter for debate and controversy.

\textbf{New accords with the national government in the matter of mining activity and tourism}

An article of 3 June 2019 on the Aporrea website reported that on 31 May 2019 there had been a meeting between government representatives and Pemón captains from Gran Sabana municipal district where the matter of reordering the mining activities had been addressed for the purpose of confining such activity to the Orinoco Mining Arc and thus avoid any effects on the national parks. However, the article does not specify the mines nor provide official information about these accords. The indigenous leaders’ plans focused on evaluating the needs and productive strengths of the mining communities, attention to the environmental liabilities that had been passed down from previous mining operations and proposals for optimizing mining operations.\textsuperscript{46} However, aside from the reports in the news media, there is no official information available that would allow one to conduct an analysis of the pertinence and viability of the actions that were reportedly agreed upon.

In December of 2019, a new meeting between government representatives and communal captains from the Canaima Camarata Sector focused on promoting tourism in CNP.\textsuperscript{47} Plans were established for reactivating the principal tourism routes, with flights

\textsuperscript{43}Idem.
\textsuperscript{44}Los indígenas desplazados se encuentran actualmente en la comunidad de Sorocaima 1 a unos 20 minutos de Pacaraima (La Línea). Leer: Cuando la memoria se abre con cautela. (Accessed on 24 FEB 2020) https://www.correodelcaroni.com/especiales/kumarakapay/4490-cuando-la-memoria-se-abre-con-cautela
\textsuperscript{45}Designan a concejal de Tupamaro como alcalde encargado en Gran Sabana (Accessed on 12 FEB 2020) https://elluchador.info/web/2019/06/14/designan-a-concejal-de-tupamaro-como-ala
de-encargado-en-gran-sabana/
\textsuperscript{46}Autoridades del pueblo Pemón organizan pasivos ambientales ocasionados por la minería ilegal (Accessed on 20 FEB 2020) https://www.aporrea.org/regionales/n342759.html
\textsuperscript{47}The government promises to boost tourism, yet it restricts the sale of gasoline to tourists because it has prioritized gasoline for use in the mining operations, which results in greater personal profits for the military officers stationed in the area.
resuming on airlines flying toward CNP, as well as the waterways that lead toward Angel Falls and other falls in the National Park.\textsuperscript{48} In this respect, toward the end of the month, Conviasa, the principal government-owned airline, announced that it would reactivate the commercial route to CNP.\textsuperscript{49}

By June of 2019, the Ministry for the Development of Ecological Mining was distributing a proposal for addressing the problematics of unauthorized mining activity in Gran Sabana municipal district,\textsuperscript{50} which would consist of delimiting and decreeing certain sectors for small-scale mining within a special indigenous area, for potential extraction of gold and diamonds, to be included as part of the Orinoco Mining Arc. The zone under consideration is located in Gran Sabana municipal district, south of CNP, and includes three blocks located in the basins of the Kukenán, Ikabarú and Caroní rivers in areas where mining rights had expired, and which were to be exploited by means of organizing small-scale mining, in production units where the state would provide technical support. The proposal is to process the old mine tailings by using equipment that recovers more than 80% of the ore, to create legislation for a special budgetary allocation for Gran Sabana municipal district based on proceeds from the mining activity, and to restore depleted areas.\textsuperscript{51} It was not possible to locate any publicly accessible information or notices about the plans for implementing the project, nor about any consultation process or discussions with the communities in the area concerning the design and application of the proposal. SOS Orinoco obtained the document through different channels originating in the indigenous sector.

The massacre at Ikabarú

The Ikabarú massacre occurred on 22 November 2019, when a group of individuals murdered eight people and left one person wounded in the mining sector of La Carlota, near the village of Ikabarú. Among the victims were one Pemón individual, one GNB soldier and an eight-year-old girl. According to Marino Alvarado, of the Provea human rights organization, the assailants wore dark clothes and some also wore masks, and they fired indiscriminately against a group a people.\textsuperscript{52} As for the motives for the massacre and the people presumed to be responsible, there are different accounts, some pointing to the “Blind Man’s Syndicate,” a mining mafia present in the area, as well as members of the national government’s security forces (SEBIN and DGCIM) or Colombian guerrillas belonging to the ELN or the FARC.\textsuperscript{53} According to National Assemblyman Andrés Velásquez, the massacre fits in with the implementation of the Orinoco Mining Arc, “for the

\textsuperscript{48} Minec potencia el turismo en el Parque Nacional Canaima. (Accessed on 20 FEB 2020) https://www.minec.gob.ve/minec-poten
cia-el-turismo-en-el-parque-nacional-canaima/

/conviasa-reactiva-la-ruta-al-parque-nacional-canaima/

\textsuperscript{50} https://drive.google.com/open?id=1fsmIacRvp_C8z9x3112-QC7tpxWHTlX

\textsuperscript{51} Problematica de la actividad minera no autorizada en el municipio Gran Sabana. (Accessed on 25 FEB 2020) https://
drive.google.com/open?id=1fsmIacRvp_C8z9x3112-QC7tpxWHTlX

\textsuperscript{52} Masacre de Ikabarú. (Accessed on 25 FEB 2020) https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/MasacreelIkabarú

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 purpose of seizing control of the area and pushing out the indigenous people.”54 Indigenous leaders in the area report that there was participation by the security forces and obvious complicity by the government, given that the zone has been heavily militarized since the events of February of 2019.55

Ikabarú is a mixed community consisting of 2,500 inhabitants whose main line of work is mining for gold and diamonds, and where indigenous and non-indigenous people live side by side. It is part of Pemón Sector No. 7, in Gran Sabana municipal district, which up until now, is the only sector where collective ownership of its habitat and lands has been recognized, in this case, by a title issued by the national government in the year 2013. Subsequently, Ikabarú was included as a special bloc of the Orinoco Mining Arc, in accordance with Decree 2.248 of February of 2016, which was promulgated without prior consultation with the indigenous communities, and without having conducted mandatory studies on the socio-environmental impact.56

Following the implementation of the so-called Orinoco Mining Arc, large numbers of miners, as well as armed criminal groups, have migrated toward the Ikabarú area. Since then, the communities have been under siege as robberies and instances of harassment multiply, and the area’s indigenous leaders have been threatened, the intention being to seize control of the gold mining operations. This led the Pemón people to assume the defense of their own territory, restricting entry by outsiders by means of the creation of the GTP, which worked in conjunction with the indigenous CCGPP and the Venezuelan military’s REDI Guayana57, as was previously explained.

The arrival of the Russian military

December of 2019 marks the reported arrival in Canaima of a detachment of 40 Russian soldiers wearing uniforms of the FANB. According to journalist Mariana Reyes, “The authorities are telling the people that the detachment has come to conduct a study of the air space, due to the fact that the Venezuelan state does not have the technology to confront the threat posed by 'the deployment of American drones' to the south of the country (...) They were promised that the visit will contribute to the revival of tourist activity in the park.”58


3.3. Explanations

It is important to identify the connections or threads linking the above-presented events. After interpreting such events, with the help of local eyewitnesses and people having knowledge of the problematics, the following observations stand out:

The report presented to IUCN and UNESCO by SOS Orinoco in July of 2018 concerning the gold mining situation in the CNP-WHS, as well as the reports by well-known journalist Valentina Quintero, exposed the Venezuelan government and demonstrated the lack of political will and institutional defense for addressing these problems. Faced with the damage this might generate for the Venezuelan government's international image, Venezuelan authorities implemented a series of actions for the purpose of demonstrating that measures for enforcing the curtailment of mining activities inside CNP were being taken.

News distributed by means of the government-controlled news media gave accounts of meetings that had been held with leaders of indigenous communities where agendas had been set for joint tasks. Nevertheless, such accounts did not go beyond the level of mere words, as they did not provide information about concrete actions, expected results or schedules for execution. The main objective of the news releases seems to have been to broadcast messages that would give the impression that the government was reaffirming that mining activity within CNP was prohibited, and that the government was determined to eradicate it. Nevertheless, these statements were never executed by way of concrete actions, and it would seem that the opposite was done instead.

Other news reports made reference to agreements that had been entered into with Pemón representatives from the Gran Sabana for the purpose of reviving tourism in CNP as an alternative for generating income for the indigenous communities and to make them less dependent on mining operations. This was done in spite of the fact that under the nation’s current situation tourism at CNP is hardly viable, except perhaps on a very small scale and limited to very elite circles.

The DGCIM operation at Canaima, as part of the Tepui Protector Plan, sought to send a message demonstrating that convincing measures were being taken. But the bloodied results of the armed incursion, and the violence and aggression committed against the Canaima community, made it clear that the real objectives were very different. The speeches by the Defense Minister and by Nicolás Maduro himself emphasized that the continued ecocide in CNP was not going to be allowed. In their speeches they criminalized the Pemón people and linked the illegal mining activity to mafias allegedly led by politicians who opposed the government. In this way, the regime shirked its responsibility and redirected it toward the indigenous people and the political opposition. Consequently, it appears that the so-called Tepui Protector Plan was but an isolated action with propagandistic goals. There is no evidence that this action was part of a far-reaching policy for curtailing mining operations in CNP. The dredging and mining operations along the Carrao River continue to operate unabated. Meanwhile, this kind of intervention directed against the miners affects the weakest link in the long chain of players, sparing the financial backers and those who control and receive the greatest economic benefits. Such actions perpetrated by the military, the government’s security forces and irregular armed groups
on indigenous territory against indigenous communities and people disguise a serious violation of international laws pertaining to the indigenous people and human rights. This is a clear sign that the regime is set on promoting the mining operations without regard for the social and political costs.

The deep economic crisis that affects the entire country, plus the collapse of PDVSA and Venezuela’s entire petroleum industry, further aggravated by the sanctions imposed by the United States, have made the government ever more dependent on the extraction of gold and other minerals from the Guayana region. The national mining policy, focused mainly on the so-called Orinoco Mining Arc, has become a lifeline for the regime. In this respect, it is to be expected that mining operations will increase in the state of Bolívar, even inside CNP. As a matter of fact, the mining activity that is developing in the Mining Arc and adjacent areas depends greatly on the promotion and protection of the chaotic mining activity conducted by medium-sized mining operators. In order to guarantee continued operation, and official control over these activities and the minerals being extracted, the government security forces (FANB, DGCIM, SEBIN and various police forces), and irregular armed groups (“syndicates,” “The System,” Colombian guerrilla forces, and “The Pranato”\(^6\)) have become fundamental.

The empowerment and control that the Pemón people had gained over their ancestral territories, and the mineral wealth found there, came to represent an obstacle for the regime and the mining mafias. This led to the implementation of a strategy that seeks to weaken the Pemón people and gain control over the mines where the Pemón people were or are working for their own benefit. This explains the high degree of conflict in the area, which originates from the government forces and the criminal groups, and is directed against the CCGOP, the GTP and the indigenous communities. The reported cases involving aggression against the community of San Luis de Morichal, the murder of José Vásquez, Chief of the Pemón Territorial Guard, the DGCIM’s operation at Canaima, and the military attack that took place amidst the arrival of the humanitarian aid, begin to make some sense in this context.

As explained by Américo De Grazia and Ricardo Delgado, gaining political control of Gran Sabana municipal district has been a strategic objective of the PSUV since Pemón leader Emilio González was elected as mayor in December of 2017, making this the only mayoral office held by the opposition in the state of Bolívar.\(^6\) From that moment on, the persecution and maneuvers by the regime to take over the municipal district intensified. Amidst the attacks that occurred in February of 2019, Emilio González took refuge in Brazil and was removed from his position as mayor. Now a mayor loyal to the regime has control

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\(^59\) Reportedly, the “syndicates” are now being displaced by “The System,” the new informal organization for controlling the mining operations, created by Colombian groups with ties to the ELN, with the consent of the national and regional governments. “The System” is now in the midst of displacing and subjugating the old “syndicates.”

\(^60\) “The Pranato” refers to the body of organized gangs made up of former prisoners. These gangs are run by prisoner-leaders, known as pranes, and who are still in prison.

\(^61\)Chavismo se asegura control político y económico de la frontera con Brasil. (Accessed on 26 FEB 2020)
https://www.correodelcaroni.com/especiales/kumaracakpay/4481-chavismo-se-asegura-control-politico-y-economico-de-la-frontera-con-brasil
over Gran Sabana municipal district, as well the mines that are worked by the indigenous communities and the area adjacent to Brazil, a matter of obvious strategic importance.

The Ikabarú massacre is a clear sign of how the dismantling of the GTP and the CCGPP has paved the way for entry by irregular groups and elements of the regime’s security forces that are associated with the mining activity, and are intent on enabling and promoting mining operations in the Ikabarú area and the rest of the Gran Sabana.

The establishment of a special indigenous area for small-scale mining in Gran Sabana municipal district is being proposed as a way to “legalize” mining operations that are currently conducted by the Pemón people, and would involve expansion of the “special Ikabarú mining bloc,” making it a part of the so-called Mining Arc. This would necessarily entail a greater inflow of Criollo miners, and an increase in the presence of the military and irregular groups in the heart of Pemón territory, thus exacerbating pressures on the CNP-WHS.

There is very little information about the arrival of the Russian military group, but it may be related to strengthening the regime’s presence and capability for surveillance and military control over the area. Since this involves indigenous territory, this kind of activity should be subject to prior consultation with the indigenous leadership, but none of the Pemón leaders has spoken out in this respect.

In conclusion, during the time interval between July of 2018 and February of 2020, the Pemón indigenous movement and the Pemón people’s control over their ancestral territory have been severely weakened. Serious human rights violations have been committed against the inhabitants of CNP and its surroundings. Meanwhile, the regime has gained political control of Gran Sabana municipal district and has bolstered the presence of its military forces and irregular groups or paramilitaries. This opens up the doors for increased occupation and greater control over mining operations in the Gran Sabana, inside as well as inside and outside of CNP, by the regime, thus exacerbating all of the environmental and sociocultural impacts.

4. Other impacts on Canaima National Park, a World Heritage Site, and on the Pemón people.

What follows is a succinct presentation of the more salient and obvious situations, as of February of 2020, that have been detected in the field and reported by eyewitnesses, and which are also closely related to events occurring during the past year and a half in CNP and its sphere of influence, and also related to the recrudescence of the humanitarian crisis Venezuela is experiencing, and which had not been detected at the time of the July 2018 report.

- The emergence of new mining sites at communities where the only kind of work being done had been traditional farming and where occasional mining activity was resorted to by some community member when they were unable to find work and needed to pay for educational and/or medical expenses. Many communities along the Troncal 10 highway work the mines alongside the waterways of CNP,
namely Uroy Uaray near Kama Falls, in Parcupí, on the Kamoirán River, on the Aponguao River and along the Yuruani River on both banks. On the Apoipó River there are approximately 20 rafts working day and night.

- The consolidation of indigenous women’s groups opposed to the mining activity, and who have objected to the entry of mining organizations consisting of indigenous people and Criollos into the park. The Women of the Water Foundation, and the Arasari and San Gabriel de Iwo organizations, which had been formed as part of the Mayú program of the office of community participation of the now defunct CVG-Edelca government corporation, are opposed to mining operations that use motor-driven pumps in the Yuruani and Chinarok River basins.

- The return of family groups to former agricultural production sites, as they seek alternatives for the production of foods and traditional agroforestry, and who seek advice on improving their production systems, in particular extensive cattle raising, and who wish to intensify production in small-sized units, with an infrastructure for managing the herds and pastures, so as to reduce the impact on other spaces.

- The rise of agriculture for commercial purposes aimed at increasing income from the sale of casabe bread and other food products derived from the bitter cassava root, also known as tapioca or manioc (Manihot esculenta), to the detriment of the local biodiversity, due to the abandonment of the cultivation of local, less commercially profitable varieties, and at the risk of not letting the cultivated fields lie fallow for sufficient time for the soil to regain its fertility. All of this is due to the loss of ancestral knowledge and/or the people's needy situation.

- Increased hunting of wildlife for immediate consumption by local inhabitants, as well as outsiders, at the mines and in the communities.

- Increased deforestation as a direct effect from the establishment of mining sites, as well as from logging for construction purposes, for firewood and for building retaining structures. This is visible in the most extensive forest in the southeastern part of CNP, where the Epodén mine is located, between the Yuruani and Kukanán rivers. This is a mine that was reactivated after being inactive since the 1970's. Also reactivated was another mine called “The Skeleton,” and both are impacting the headwaters of the Mapaurí River and the forests around the Warumadén River.

- Proliferation of endemic diseases associated with mining activities, transmitted by insects (malaria, gastrointestinal diseases, leishmaniasis, scabies). For example, at the community of Kuy Teremepö, all the families became ill; by coincidence, most of the young men older than age twenty are working at the mines.

- An increase in children dropping out of school at communities in the Kukenán River basin, as families are drawn into mining operations.
Most of the government employees present in CNP and its spheres of influence look toward mining activities as a source of income and they split their work time between their “formal” jobs on the one hand, and mining activities on the other. Nurses and teachers have quit their jobs to go work at the mines. Several schools no longer have any students because entire families have moved away from their usual residential locations.

During the past six months, there has been a severe fuel shortage in Gran Sabana municipal district, perhaps worse than in the rest of the country, and this has slowed down “normal” mining activity, and contributed to a greater use of manual gravimetric mining, which does not use motor-driven pumps, but instead uses sieves, gold pans and shovels, and is often referred to as “artisanal” mining. However, artisanal mining continues on a smaller scale than does the other more “normal” mining activity. The officially-set price of Venezuelan-produced gasoline is laughingly low, making it practically free. This, together with the current shortage, has further encouraged a criminal network to take over its distribution and resale. It is common knowledge that this network is controlled by military officers. The small amount of gasoline that reaches the Gran Sabana is either smuggled into Brazil, where it draws much higher prices, or it goes to the mining operations, which is the only economic sector able to afford the high prices charged by the gasoline mafia. Furthermore, it is common knowledge that there is a tight connection between the gasoline distribution networks and the mining operators. Medium to large-scale mining is impossible without any fuel. Access to fuel is necessary for transporting people, and the mining operations’ high demand for fuel makes it less available for domestic use.

The fuel distribution business belongs exclusively to military officers. On a weekly basis, light aircraft loaded with fuel fly from Santa Elena de Uairén to Ikabarú, following the river as far as Urimán and the Caroni River. However, part of the gasoline sold informally at the retail level comes from Brazil and is brought in on two tank trucks from which it is dispensed directly into automobile tanks and into individual gasoline containers. At this stage, the gasoline is sold at the price of 4.50 Brazilian reals per liter and then resold elsewhere in Santa Elena for 5.00 reals or more, depending on supply and demand.

There is evidence of an increase in the use of firewood for cooking, due to the shortage of domestic gas, as well as an increase in the production and commercialization of charcoal for the bigger population centers in CNP as well as in its surroundings. One also notices a greater impact on the fragile ecosystems of the moriche palm groves, because the fruit and fibers of the moriche palm (Mauritia

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Flexuosa, also known as ‘buriti palm’, are being harvested, as well as the edible larvae, or worms, associated with this palm.

- Within the indigenous communities, there has been a rise in the frequency of internal problems related to controversies and differences of opinion concerning the matter of mining operations, and has culminated in animosity family groups and heads of household (patamona, in the Pemón language), who had previously been working together on projects related to the governance of their communities. Conflicts within and among communities, such as what was witnessed in the events of February of 2019, have also become clearly obvious. Internal meetings are being held in the communities and the issue of mining operations continues to be discussed.

- There are communities that have assumed radical stances against the regime. This stems from the delayed, and unfulfilled, process of granting legal recognition to the indigenous territories, the exclusion of parts of the Pemón people from the government’s social policies and the lack of access to basic services. Nevertheless, there are pro-regime communities whose active participation in the “missions” promoted by the regime is on the decline, which are becoming less effective.

5. Final considerations

Our research for this update to the 2018 report demonstrates that gold mining activity continues to expand inside Canaima National Park, a World Heritage Site, as well as in surrounding areas. One year and seven months after publicly denouncing the unacceptable presence of mining operations inside CNP, it becomes increasingly evident that the Maduro regime has no political interest in banning these mining operations that are destroying Venezuela’s natural and cultural heritage. Furthermore, the regime now has fewer and fewer institutional environmental or law enforcement resources available for challenging this situation responsibly and effectively. Nor has there been any response of a social nature for helping the indigenous communities that are now dependent on the mining operations. Quite the contrary, mechanisms of coercion and negotiations of an illegal nature have been emerging as a de facto way of “legalizing” the mining activity. The mining activity continues to run rampant and is increasing inside CNP, and falls within the realm of possible political pacts between the regime and the indigenous leaders. In recent months, violence has been unleashed by the regime, through formal and informal mechanisms, all of it related to mining operations in one way or another with the mining operations inside CNP and along its outer boundaries, and the evidence points to such violence as being part of the regime’s strategy to achieve the goals of those political accords. Given this setting, it is absolutely impossible to provide effective protection to the
attributes that have identified CNP as a World Heritage site. Support from the Pemón indigenous people is indispensable for success in saving CNP from the mining operations.

Without a doubt, it is necessary to reclassify Canaima National Park as being “in critical danger,” considering the conservation perspective defined by the IUCN itself (Osipova et al. 2014). Consequently, bearing in mind the complex humanitarian crisis that all of Venezuela is experiencing, as well as the Maduro regime’s openly pro-mining policy that disregards its environmental obligations, it becomes necessary to include Canaima National Park on the List of World Heritage in Danger. Only in that way, will it be possible to generate the international support that is necessary for success in having the Venezuelan state undo this threat, abolishing the mining operations and achieving a governance that is sustainable and respectful toward the Pemón people, thus allowing for the conservation of the attributes that justified its designation as a World Heritage Site, which has become a matter of great pride for the people of Venezuela.

APPENDIX
Survey of Periodical Publications and Other Sources

1. Chronology of mining activity in Canaima: Continuation of the 2018 analysis

2011

- “Simón explained that, at the mines located in the vicinity of the Arekuna, Cocurital and Yuri Falls sectors, south of Canaima, the miners are working using all the necessary machinery, such as rafts, motor-driven pumps, hoses, drums, and other elements, which they keep hidden in the woods or bring back on river vessels shortly after dusk in order to do their work under cover of night, and then quit just before sunrise. However, at the mine located near the Aerotuy camp, we could clearly see how that mine was operating unhindered in broad daylight. The illegal miners are doing as they please, just fifteen miles from the village of Canaima, thus causing great harm to CNP.” Source: LosTubazos 2018

2014

- “Office of the Comptroller General of the Republic (CGR): ‘Based on the on-site inspection conducted on 14 May 2014 at the Indigenous Community of Campo Alegre, geographically located at the following coordinates: N 04° 45’ 80” and W 61° 12’ 00”, in the eastern sector of Canaima National Park, it was determined that mining activity was taking place near the Kukenán River, using motor-driven pumps and conveyor belts for extracting gold.’” Source: ipysvenezuela 2019

2018

- **October:** Here is the video. “The Campo Carrao mine grows bigger by the day. That’s located next to the Akanán River, which flows into the Carrao, inside the Park. The mining rafts move about freely along the Carrao River. Here they are in the video. They’re already mining on Orquídea Island and in front of the Well of Happiness. They hide in the back channels and come out after the dugout canoes have left with the tourists that are visiting Angel Falls. It’s the same route, always next to Auyan Tepui and inside the Park. At Aonda - almost across from Orquídea Island - we saw a mining camp. We wanted to visit the old Tiuna Camp, but we were ordered to turn back. We crossed paths with a curiara [dugout canoe] that was loaded with 10 gasoline drums, each holding about 180 to 200 liters. Each drumful is worth 25 grams of gold [approximately 0.88 ounces]. Link to source: BlogLemu 2018

- **November:** “The SOS-Orinoco website has identified some 33 places where there are mining operations inside Canaima Park, or nearby. That information, together with what has been gathered, indicates that there is participation by indigenous people at the mines, at least in the following places: the area along the mid-section of the Caura River basin, the Paragua River basin (El Casabe, Tonoro River, Karún River), the Caroní River basin (Las Calaveras, Campo Alegre, Sampai, Chiricayén, Apoipó, Surucúin River, Acaredén, Yacrimá, Amac River, Uaiparú River, Pakupí, Apremé River, Aripichí, Pirma River, Tirika River, Urimán, Boquini, U
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Guacharaca, Chicharrón, Asapati, Carrao River, Wadetey, Kuana, Mowak River). The location of some of these sectors demonstrates that what one might call the indigenous mining arc has already been implemented." Source: El Nacional 2018.

Other rivers to check: "Mining activity in the Caroni River basin is being developed mostly in the Protection Zone for the State of Bolívar (western and southeastern part of the basin) and the southwestern part of Canaima National Park. This activity is being done illegally (mainly by the Regime’s mafias) and extends in a disperse manner from the headwaters to the lower part of the Caroni River, and thus affects the sub-basins of the Paragua, Ikabarú, Uaiparú and Caroni rivers, where its development is fully underway, especially along the Urimán, Acanam, Capuí, Asa, Oris, Chiguao and Guarí rivers, among others. Gold and diamonds stand out among the precious minerals being extracted, while, aside from iron ore, the exploitation of other resources is focused more on sand, gravel, kaolin and ornamental rocks." Source: VenteVenezuela 2019.

● November: Testimony regarding the Kamarata mine: ‘‘We’re not going to be miners forever,’ said Elio Manrique, a park ranger and resident of Kamarata. ‘It’s only temporary.’ But the social costs have already been high. Carlos Abati, who has taught English at the secondary school for 19 years, said that the parents are choosing to send their children to work at the mines instead of going to school to learn English in order to serve as tourist guides. Hortensia Berti, a former Pemón captain here, said that she was having difficulty trying to run a tourist camp where the huts were made of palm shells, because all the mining activity and the government’s food donations had made the people in her village lazy. She said that until the tourist trade is revived, she would rather see the Pemón people return to cultivating their cornfields and small vegetable patches as they have done for a long time. ‘Everyone here just wants to get rich quick,’ said Berti. ‘This isn’t what our grandparents would have expected from us. Already there’s a mine in our own patio. Where will this end?’” Source: El nuevo país 2018.

2019

● Location of active mining rafts: One at the mouth of the Akanán River, five along the waters of the Carrao and 14 in the Arenal sector alone. Source: runrunés 2019.

2. Historical background of the evictions, detentions and arrest warrants related to mining activity in Canaima: Continuation of the 2018 analysis

2019

● “Evidence of how Canaima’s gold is being trafficked was revealed by none other than the Nicolás Maduro government. On 16 August 2019, the attorney general serving the national constituent assembly, Tarek William Saab, announced the warrant for the arrest and extradition of César Leonel Días González, a 47-yr-old businessman associated with half a dozen tourism companies in the state of Bolívar, one of which runs the controversial Ara Merú Lodge, which is located inside CNP, Canaima sector, alongside the Carrao River and
provided lodging for individuals that, on 8 December 2018, conducted “Operation Tepui Protector,” which was an attack carried out by the Office of Military Intelligence (DGCIM), resulting in one person dead and two wounded. All Pemón people.” At Arenal. Source: runrunes 2019.

3. Agreements and campaigns for recovery and restoration:
Continuation of the 2018 analysis

2018

- **August.** “During a meeting held by the Operational Strategic Command of the Bolivarian National Armed Force (CEOFANB), the Pemón people expressed the need to work in conjunction with the Venezuelan state in order to guarantee control over the mining operations and territorial security, and to protect nature and the human communities. During the meeting, Minister [of Ecological Mining Development] Víctor Cano stated: ‘A necessary condition of the Mining Arc is to lend weight and credence to the opinion of the indigenous peoples. Since the year 2016, we have held 120 meetings with the indigenous peoples of the Orinoco Mining Arc.’ In this respect, he explained that he had participated in six exclusive meetings with the Pemón people to listen to the proposals from the 186 Pemón settlements in the Orinoco region. Cano stated that the national government had heard each proposal from the indigenous communities. ‘For the Pemón people, nothing happens by chance: everything has been written. It is a spiritual message telling us that, every August, the month when President Hugo Chávez announced the delimitation of the Orinoco Mining Arc, we should continue to hold this working meeting, for the rest of our lives.’” Source: MPPRE 2018.

- **11 October:** “The head of the Operational Strategic Command of the Bolivarian Armed Force (CEOFANB), Admíral in Chief Remigio Ceballos Ichaso, held a meeting with representatives from the indigenous communities for the purpose of protecting this natural monument from environmental predators. The information was published this Tuesday in the @ceofanb Twitter account, where it was explained that the actions are being taken in order to strengthen the Fifth Objective of the Fatherland Plan, which includes preserving life on the planet and saving the human species.” Source: Radiocayaurima 2018.

- **15 October:** “‘We come to make sincere proposals with participation. This is a national park, and there are activities that are not permitted. I must tell the Pemón people that they live in a very complex geographic reality; we do not want to mortgage Venezuela’s future,’ stated Heryck Rangel, Minister of Ecosocialism, who invited the entire community of Canaima to redouble their participation in the national plan for preserving the park’s natural wealth.” Source: control ciudadano 2018.

“A commission from the Office of the Ombudsman visited the communities of Kamarata and Urimán in Canaima National Park, in the state of Bolívar, as part of Operation Tepui Protector, which seeks to guarantee the protection and vigilance of the indigenous communities in the area and their habitat. This activity by Operation Tepui Protector is part of the commitments agreed upon at the roundtable discussions that were held between different government entities and the indigenous communities this past October 15th,
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which seek, furthermore, to ban illegal mining in the protected areas of Canaima National Park.” Source: Defensoría 2018.

“Last week government authorities made it clear to indigenous spokespersons that the government had assumed responsibility for controlling mining activity south of the Orinoco River, and for using a civic-military detachment to curb and eradicate mining operations inside Canaima. A group of cabinet ministers representing the National Executive met with leaders and spokespersons representing the Pemón village of Kanaimó for the purpose of establishing a joint agenda for the protection and defense of the park, according to the Minister of Mining. Meanwhile, Aloha Núñez, Minister for the Indigenous Peoples, explained that the community of Kanaimó will receive help for reactivating production areas associated with low environmental impact, such as agriculture, cattle raising, and of course tourism with active participation by the community.” Source: Banca y Negocios 2018.

“Minister [Víctor Cano] said, ‘This matter needs to be looked at very carefully, with extreme caution; we need to make an effort to find the best practices, our goal being the preservation of our natural resources; however, outside of the authorized zones, mining operations are not permitted, and we’re going to enforce the law. The Mining Arc was created precisely to protect the river basins and the biodiversity.’ According to AVN [the government-owned Venezuelan News Agency], since 2016, there has been a total of 121 meetings with the indigenous communities of the Mining Arc.” Source: El Universal 2018.

2019

- **June:** “In order to enhance the geographic reordering of mining operations in the Orinoco Arc, a meeting was held on this 31st day of May at the Office of the Governor of Bolívar in the presence of Governor Justo Noguera Pietri; Minister for Ecological Mining Development Víctor Cano, Minister of Indigenous Peoples Aloha Núñez and the captains from among the Pemón people of Gran Sabana municipal district. Minister Víctor Cano stated that the proposals from the indigenous people had been heard, in which they pointed out that the environmental liabilities inherited from capitalistic mining operations would be looked into. In his Twitter account he stated, ‘We heard their proposals for optimizing mining production and for fending off any power that may want to steal our natural resources.’” Source: Aporrea 2019.

- **November:** “MINEC [Ministry of Ecosocialism] Breathes Life into Tourism. The meeting was attended by spokespersons from the Ministry of Tourism (MINTUR), the National Aeronautics Institute (INAC), the Captaincy General of Sector B, Captain Domingo Castro and the principal Communal Captains of Canaima National Park from Sector B, Camaino Camarata. At the meeting, the projection and enhancement of Sector B of the aforementioned park were discussed, in addition to calling to mind different existing agreements, with the goal of boosting tourism as an economic driver, as proposed by the Executive and all actions of MINEC. Furthermore, it was announced that ‘among the more important roadmaps we have established is the establishment of the principal tourist routes through the reactivation of the likewise important airlines that fly to Canaima National Park in Sector B of Camaino Camarata.’” Source: Minec 2019.

- **December:** “Conviasa [the principal state-owned airline] reactivates the route to Canaima National Park. Conviasa’s announcement came following what had happened in the Ikabarú
sector, where at least eight people were murdered by members of “The Blindman’s Syndicate” that were intending to seize illegal control over the mines. Then, later, a few days ago, there was the aircraft accident at Caracas Airport, located near Charallave in Valles del Tuy, where a small aircraft - inbound from Guasipati, in the state of Bolívar - crashed with nine people onboard.” Source: asimplevista 2019.

4. Denunciations

2018

- “Maduro was emphatic: ‘I hereby issue the public order to the chief of the Strategic Region of Integral Defense (REDI) so that he will guarantee environmental stability and protection in Bolívar. There are armed groups. They have infiltrated some of the indigenous communities. But, whenever we act, then the international campaign starts. Standing behind the ecocide - I have already denounced it - is a political mafia from the right. Andrés Velásquez and Américo De Grazia are two political figures behind the mining mafias that are devastating our territory.’” Source: desarrollominero.gob.ve 2018.

2019

- An aircraft lands at runway serving as gateway to Canaima with 40 Russian soldiers wearing Venezuelan uniforms: “Authorities are telling the people that the detachment has come to conduct a study of the air space, due to the fact that the Venezuelan state does not have the technology to confront the threat presented by ‘the deployment of American drones’ in the southern part of the country (...) They [the residents] were promised that the visit would contribute to the reactivation of tourism in the park. However, on the other hand, they were assured that the Russians are leaving Friday.’ Journalist Mariana Reyes’s thread further states: ‘There is concern and nervousness among the residents because it has not been made clear to them why the Russians are there and they have been ordered not to take any photographs or videos.’” Source: venezuelausa 2019.

2020

- “The Nicolás Maduro regime has granted Russia and Iran exclusive rights in Venezuela to extract thorium, a strategic mineral for building nuclear weapons, and which is reportedly being used to finance international terrorism. National Assemblyman Américo De Grazia reported that Russian soldiers, as well as Iranians associated with Hezbollah, were in charge of extracting this mineral from CNP.” Source: Panampost 2020.

5. The Pemon People’s Current Situation

2018

- 26 September: “On 26 September 2018, in Gran Sabana municipal district, Pemon leader José Vásquez was murdered. According to PROVEA, he had previously been successful at
fending off armed groups that control mining activity in that area.” Source: efecto cocuyo 2019.

- **November:** Mining activity by the indigenous peoples has evolved and has adopted *Criollo* practices. There have been reports of the existence of an armed paramilitary group called the Pemón Territorial Guard, which is trying to gain control of the mines that have been worked by the *Criollos* in the Ikabarú area for the past 50 years; it is almost certain that it was this violence that led to the murder of José Vásquez, commander of that paramilitary group, a few weeks ago. Another deplorable act reportedly occurred in August of this year, involving a dispute that led to six deaths, in which members of the Sanema ethnic group had allied themselves with *Criollo* ‘syndicates’ and confronted members of the Habi ethnic group over control of a mine near Miripa. It is easy to predict that soon the more vulnerable indigenous groups will become victims of ethnic groups that have more advanced resources; in the past, wars have been fought over control of the territory and over hunting rights, and now the same may happen again over control of the gold mining operations, and this must be avoided; we must not allow this violence to continue to affect the Hoti (in the Maigualida Sierra) or to bring about a repeat of the massacres committed against the Yanomami (in the Sierra Neblina and Sierra Parima-Tapoiapó).” Source: El Nacional 2018.

- **21 November:** “The First Pemón People’s Festival. The First Festival of the Pemón’s Koro Kupay Wena Culture was held in Canaima National Park, an initiative of the Bolivarian government, through the Ministry of the People’s Power for Culture (MPPC) and the Cultural Heritage Institute (IPC). (...) The Festival also supports the National Orinoco Mining Arc Strategic Development Zone, part of the state’s political strategy for sustained development of the country’s mineral wealth in that region and for the fight against illegal mining activity, which also attempts against the original cultures. Participating in the fair were members of the Kamaracoto and Kamarata communities, belonging to the Pemón ethnic group, and who, dressed in their ancestral attire, intoned their community’s own music in their native language and recited stories that narrate the cosmogony of the Pemón people and their kinship with the Carib people.” mincultura 2018.

- **December:** “On 8 and 9 December, members of Venezuela’s General Office of Military Intelligence (DGCIM) conducted a military operation in the ancestral territory belonging to the Pemón communities in CNP. On 8 December, during the operation, Charly Peñaloza, a young Pemón male, was murdered, and three other Pemón individuals were wounded. According to testimonies from the survivors and statements from the Council of Chieftains General of the Pemón People, none of them were armed. On 9 December, soldiers of the armed forces, together with the DGCIM, closed off all entrances to Canaima National Park, blocking free movement by indigenous people within their own territory, and then committed acts of violence and harassment against the Canaima community using tear gas, rounds of fire from high-caliber machineguns, and helicopter overflights. The Tepui Protector Plan had been devised by the Defense Ministry and the Operational Strategic Command of the Bolivarian Armed Force (CEOFANB) for the purpose of confronting illegal mining operations in the state of Bolívar. At a press conference on 11 December, the Defense Minister, General in Chief Vladimir Padrino López gave assurances that the operation conducted on 8 and 9 December had been done in concert with the Pemón
current gold mining situation in 2020 at canaima national park, a world heritage site in venezuela: update to the 2018 report submitted to unesco

 PADRINO explained that, last saturday, the Bolivarian National Armed Force (FANB) conducted a military operation in Canaima Park, Arenales sector, El Carrao, against illegal mining activity, which resulted in the destruction of mining rafts that were being used to extract gold, and had been damaging and destroying the vegetation cover. He also stated that this was ‘to free the people from paramilitarism, the traffic generated by extraction activity and from the illegal mining operations, and in order to protect the environment.’ The Sectorial Vice President stated that during the operation there was a confrontation with armed mining gangs, which resulted in four people receiving bullet wounds, and that unfortunately, one of the wounded, identified as Charles Peñaloza, a 21-year-old member of the Pemón community, who was present at the site, had died later.” Source: Minci 2018.

“According to the Kapé Kapé observatory, at least one member of the Pemón community died and an unconfirmed number of people were wounded during an operation in Canaima Park carried out by members of the DGCIM. Journalist Germán Dam, confirmed that Carlos Peñaloza, one of the indigenous people wounded by the DGCIM in Canaima, had died while under medical care at Ruiz y Páez University Hospital in Ciudad Bolívar, where he was taken along with his brother Charly, who was also in critical condition. Both had bullet wounds to the chest. According to accounts from area residents, the soldiers had arrived heavily armed, with their faces covered over with hoods, during an operation directed against the illegal mining operations. Also wounded during the operation were two DGCIM soldiers. However, members of the community prevented their transfer to a medical facility. As soon as the community found out about the first two wounded Pemón men, they mounted an attack against the CORPOELEC Camp and set fire to the fuel that was stored there. They also closed down the airport’s runway, thus preventing entry or departure from the area.” Source: WakaNoticias 2018.

“This Saturday, Alfredo Ruiz, the Venezuelan government’s Ombudsman, said that the death of an indigenous person is ‘a delicate situation.’ In statements to Unión Radio he explained that “there seems to have been a confrontation (...) what we know is that one person died and another person was wounded.’ He further explained that ‘there is an ongoing investigation into the circumstances under which this occurred.’ In contrast with the case of Fernando Albán, where minutes later [Attorney General] Tarek William Saab quickly determined that the politician’s death had been a ‘suicide,’ he issued no statements concerning the death of this Pemón individual, aside from saying that personnel from the Office of the Attorney General and the Office of the Ombudsman have gone to the area and that prosecutors had been assigned to the case. This situation resulted in the suspension of the election for municipal council members, according to information from Socorro Hernández, a rector at the National Electoral Council (CNE). Américo De Grazia revealed that the suspension is due to the fact that a group of indigenous people ‘had seized control of the voting centers (...) in order to prevent the elections scheduled for today, Sunday’ as a sign of protest. He tweeted: ‘They stayed at the Ara Merú Tourist Camp as tourists. That’s where they received the weapons. They hired an Angel Falls tour operator. While on the way, they tied up the motorized canoe operators and the tour guides, and then changed their route to initiate action against the indigenous people...later they received air support from a military helicopter sent to evacuate the alleged tourists. This shows that it’s an operation by the Regime directed against the indigenous people in order to evict them by military force and...”

Source: Amnistia 2018.
“According to accounts by the local media, Peñaloza died defending other indigenous people that were under attack during a covert DGCIM operation that was using military weapons. Also used in this operation were the resources of the National Electric Corporation (CORPOELEC). Local residents were able to overcome the soldiers thanks to their numeric superiority, and they captured some of them. They also helped themselves to the weapons and explosives that the assailants were carrying. Pemón leaders consider Peñaloza’s death to be a “murder,” a description shared by Amnesty International, which has demanded putting an end to the government’s attacks against the indigenous communities. The Pemón people accuse the government of using the pretext of defending the environment as justification for militarizing the area in order to gain control of its resources. The Ministry of Communication did not respond to a request for information from BBC Mundo concerning the situation at Canaima. Waiting for us at Santa Elena was a member of the Council of Chieftains, an organization consisting of the leaders of the Pemón communities. He appeared to be nervous and exhausted by the days of push and shove following the death of Peñaloza. ‘This is no joke. We’re fighting against the State,’ he told us. However, dozens of the Pemón people, who had crowded around the airport to prevent it from falling into the hands of the government forces, demanded to know who we were and what were our intentions in Canaima. ‘This war is from way back when. They’ve been trying to lord it over us because of the wealth of gold in our lands. They managed to do this to our parents, but with us, they won’t be able to.’ ‘The government is the one that’s forcing us to go to the mines. We don’t do this because we want to; we do it out of necessity,’ stated Achimiko. She further said that Maduro has made her feel ‘indignant.’ ‘They accuse us of selling gold outside the country, when in fact it’s the government we’re selling it to. What they want is to have sole command here so that they’re the ones in charge.’ ‘We’ve never gone through a situation as difficult as this before, and that’s what draws us to the mine.’ Whenever it’s his turn to work, Jesús’s associates come by for him and he’s gone for days on the mining rafts present in the area. There, while in a curiara, the traditional indigenous dugout canoe, his job is to make sure that enough oxygen is being delivered to the divers that stay submerged for hours in search of the precious metal. Sometimes it’s necessary to search for days in order to find what they’re looking for. On the day following the foray, the journalists find out that Galletti is announcing that they’re going to return the captured weapons to the members of the DGCIM, but he forewarns: “We’re giving up our lives for the sake of our people. If there should be another incursion into our territory and against our people, rest assured that we won’t let that stand. Either they kill us, or we’ll kill them using their own weapons.” BBC 2018.

An official explanation of the events: “Following reports that one Pemón had been killed, and two others wounded, this past 8 December during an operation executed by the General Office of Military Counterintelligence, DGCIM, and directed against mining activities in that territory, ongoing investigations by the security and intelligence forces have determined that there is a gold mafia present among the area’s indigenous communities, and that it is exploiting the protected area indiscriminately, leading to its destruction.” Globovisión 2018.
December: “This is how everything began to be priced in terms of its value in gold. The plight of many indigenous people had been that of semi-slavery and they were forced to see their young sons and daughters and wives being auctioned off at the mines for sexual purposes. Faced with this situation, the Pemón people had two choices: (1) continue being semi-slaves at mines controlled by the syndicates, the military and the government, or (2) control the mines that were on their own territory, and not open to outsiders, as a way to keep these mafias from entering. The indigenous people that have had to choose mining in order to survive, state that this has been the only way to have access to western goods, which had been prohibitive for them, and which the state has not known how to make available, as its public policy involves welfarism rather than incentives for productive jobs. With the gold, the indigenous people are able to meet their basic needs: buying a pair of slippers, some food or clothing items, medicines, or a mobile telephone. Alicia Moncada, a member of the Wayúu community, and a human rights activist, explains, for example, that, in the case of the Pemón people, having gold means investing in medications for the outpatient clinics, or in the means of transportation necessary for moving about. It means investing in the community. ‘For the indigenous people, there are no models of logic pertaining to accumulation, except for those who have assimilated Criollo ways to a high degree,’ explains Moncada. ‘Why weren’t there any mining operations back then, like we have now? Because people already had a way to support themselves. Now their children go to school and have needs. Educators have resigned because their salaries are not enough. At what point does a teacher find it necessary to work in a cornfield? If a child is ill, where does one get the medicine? At La Línea [in Brazil], and payable in reals [Brazilian currency]. But gold does not renew itself. Therefore, you can’t rely on working at the mine. Then what persists? Cultivation of the fields,’ says Blanca Ramírez, a Pemón woman.” Source: Vitti 2018.

2019

22 February: “A group of Pemon tried to prevent the GNB and the Army from transferring anti-riot units to the border with Brazil, specifically to Santa Elena de Uairén. (...) Américo De Grazia, the National Assemblyman for that district, stated that, subsequent to actions taken by the national guards, there were reports of several cases of people who had gunshot wounds and were in need of urgent medical attention. According to De Grazia’s count, there were 15 people wounded (some of them from gunfire), meanwhile National Assemblywoman Larissa González reported that 22 people had been affected. (...) What has happened in the state of Bolívar is consistent with the actions taken by the GNB last Thursday when several of their troops placed obstacles on the highway in order to block a caravan of members of the National Assembly and volunteers that had left Caracas on the morning of 22 February to go to the state of Táchira [on the border with Colombia]. In an incident that occurred in the predawn hours this Friday, two drivers were injured by rocks that were thrown at the vehicles.” Source: cronica.uno 2019.

“Also, National Assemblyman Romel Guzamana explained that those who are suppressing the community in the Gran Sabana are not actually FAES or GNB troops, but are infiltrated individuals: ‘These murderers are criminals that have been given uniforms. We counted more than 60 buses and 16 Toyota 4-Runners from which shots were fired, and that’s why there were so many deaths.’” Source: El Tiempo 2019.
“For quite some time, the Venezuelan government has not been acting in good faith toward Mother Earth or toward human beings. Its interest is that of controlling the Pemón territory militarily in order to promote the Mining Arc, in alliance with organized crime, armed groups and its own international allies.” Source: pueblosencamino.org 2018.

“The Pemón people created the Council of Chieftains General of the Pemón People, the community leaderships and the Pemón Indigenous Territorial Guard, all of which belong to nobody but the communities themselves. These bodies answer to the ancestral authority elected by all of the Pemon people and are not a paramilitary group as is claimed in the information matrix generated by the national government.” Source: cpalsocial.org 2019.

“Among the rights that have been infringed upon, we denounce the failure to recognize their right to their territory and their habitat, as well as their original rights over the lands that they have been occupying ancestrally and traditionally, as well their collective property rights over these lands, all of which are necessary for developing and guaranteeing their way of life.” SIGNISALC 2019.

The above documentation is contained in a comprehensive article by Minerva Vitti, found in the Global Voices website. Source: Global Voices 2019.

● 2019: In the western sector of Canaima National Park there is an agreement among the Pemón, the original inhabitants of these ancestral lands, to work the mines only at night, out of sight of the ever-diminishing numbers of tourists that visit the Arenal preserve. Source: runrunes 2019.

● April: “Some 900 indigenous people have fled from the illegal mining operations. According to indigenist activist Olnar Ortiz, the exodus accelerated after the death of seven people at the indigenous community of Kumarakapay in the southern state of Bolívar, near the Brazilian, border during a failed attempt to bring across the border donations from the United States consisting of food and medical supplies this past 23 February. The incidents resulted in 47 people wounded from gunfire, and 62 detained, between 22 and 28 February. The shipments had been arranged by Juan Guaidó.” Source: DW 2019.

● June: “A councilman representing the Tupamaro movement was appointed acting mayor of Gran Sabana. With a majority vote from the members of the Municipal Council of Gran Sabana, in the state of Bolívar, José Alejandro Barreto was named acting mayor for the municipal district, after the absolute absence of mayor-elect Emilio González had been determined.” Source: El Luchador 2019.

● 22 November: Reports of the massacre at Ikabarú mine. “The attack, reportedly directed against miners working at the site, left at least six dead, according to a denunciation sent to Efecto Cocuyo by Olnar Ortiz Bare, an attorney and national leader of indigenous people, and a member of the non-governmental organization Foro Penal. The lawyer reported that communications were cut off at 3:00 a.m. on Saturday, 23 November, and that what little information the NGO can gather has been coming from the survivors that managed to escape to nearby areas. Among the deceased is a sergeant major by the name of Antonio Perea. Another one of the victims was Edidson Ramón Soto (age 47), a Pemón originally from Ikabarú, but who had been living in Manak Krú, Ortiz confirmed. ‘We don't know the number of people that were murdered, but people are saying it was anywhere between six
and nine. It was not a confrontation; they actually burst into the community,' the attorney emphasized. According to witnesses, the armed group committing the massacre allegedly belongs to the syndicate known as ‘El Ciego’ [The Blindman], which controls the area around La Paragua. They arrived at the community looking for a man named ‘Cristóbal,’ the boss at the La Carlota mine. This is not the first time the people of the state of Bolívar have been victimized by the gold war. This past February 10th, a military incursion at the Guasipati mine left 18 dead. Also, in August of 2017, a clash between alleged criminals and the military at El Callao left eight dead. A similar event occurred near the town of Tumeremo, which was shaken in March of 2016 by the murder of 17 miners, whose bodies were found in a common grave, and some months later, it was reported that there had been another massacre there, resulting in 11 deaths.” Source: Aporrea 2019.

“Also, there are reports that shortly after midnight, at 12:04, a Toyota Land Cruiser Troop Carrier went past the Secorfront indigenous checkpoint carrying National Guard soldiers, headed in the direction of Ikabarú. This last bit of information is important because it shows that the situation is more complicated than it would seem, and the inhabitants are asking themselves whether this involves armed groups associated with the syndicates or whether the massacres are being perpetrated by real military troops intent on gaining control of the gold mining operations in these territories. One of the sources states: "The National Guard was aware of what was going to happen. We are stating this for the public record, before all jurisdictions, that the right to life has been violated at Ikabarú, in Pemón indigenous territory, and that the Venezuelan government has failed to meet its obligation to PROTECT its indigenous and non-indigenous citizens.” Source: SOS Orinoco 2019.

“The government wants people to believe that there are criminal gangs wanting to gain control over the area; but they’re the ones bringing people in here and then blaming others; in this case, they’re blaming the Blindman’s Syndicate; but those behind this massacre are none other than the team led by Óscar Maita and Justo Noguera (governor of Bolívar).” Source: ACN 2019.

“The enactment and expansion of the Orinoco Mining Arc entails consequences for the indigenous peoples, not just because of the destruction of their territories, but also because of the way these lands have been appropriated without prior consultation and are being subjected to parallel domination structures that act with the support of the state, and to violence, to forced resettlements and to the loss of traditions and cultures. Starting from the time of this enactment, PROVEA warned of the fatal consequences for the indigenous peoples and their environment and of the encroachment of violence and destruction into these territories, including areas beyond the boundaries of the project, as these were considered to be live frontiers. (..) We warned about this form of colonization and about the extermination of the indigenous peoples’ ancestral cultures, their territories and their traditional ways of interrelating, and about the killings taking place by actions of the state or by its own neglect, and we warned about the failure of the Venezuelan state to meet its obligations in the matter of guaranteeing, promoting and protecting the rights of the indigenous peoples and communities in Venezuela.” Source: Provea 2019.

“The community accuses the Blindman’s Syndicate, whose alleged leader controls the area around La Paragua, while reaching out as far as Ikabarú, where he has gained control of the La Carlota mine. The gold war and the massacres are not confined just to Sifontes and El Callao municipal districts, but have also moved on into Pemón territory, to a mixed
community in this case. The gold war has invaded Pemón territory." Source: Caraota Digital 2019.

"According to the official government version, the massacre was allegedly perpetrated by members of the Blindman's Gang, whose leader is the pran of the mining areas of La Paragua and El Manteco, more than 900 kilometers [by road] from the site of the massacre. As the days go by, local residents are beginning to suspect that, in reality, this was an operation executed by the state's security forces, who intend to militarize the indigenous territories in order to appropriate them and their resources. (...) One of the deceased was a retired National Guard sergeant by the name of Antonio José Perera Flores. Every Friday, he would go to the Ikabarú mines to earn some money. A source living in the area stated that he was shot when he was taking photographs of the victimizers. He was buried without an autopsy being performed. (...) During the morning of Monday, 25 November, two more bodies were found at the La Sabanita mine, near the village of Ikabarú. According to residents, the dead individuals were Cristian and Cristóbal Ruiz Barrios. Reportedly, the latter was being sought by the victimizers before they began to shoot. ‘Many witnesses say that they (the victimizers) had used the back door to leave the Ikabarú Health Center, and that is where the National Guard command post is located. In other words, they had been there a long time while planning and looking over everything, and of course they knew who they were going to kill, because this was not a massive massacre, but rather something more selective,’ stated Ricardo Delgado." Source: Lorena en RunRunes 2019.

● 22 December: "Report of assault at army battalion post in Gran Sabana. A group of Pemon led by a former member of the National Guard assaulted and captured the Mariano Montilla Infantry and Jungle Battalion, in Gran Sabana municipal district, in the state of Bolívar, this Sunday during the predawn hours. From there, they took 112 rifles, as well as ammunition, from the weapons depot. They fled in two pickup trucks: a Toyota Hilux and a Mitsubishi Triton. According to the official communiqué, they also abducted the battalion commander, as well as two officers. After leaving the site, they took the Troncal 9 highway and later had a confrontation at a State of Bolívar Police post at San Francisco de Yuruaní, where they took more weapons. (...) A few meters further, they were confronted by National Guard troops, who arrested the movement’s leader and recovered part of the weapons." Source: Primicia 2019.

“Following this Sunday’s predawn events at a battalion post and at a police station in the Gran Sabana municipal district, Ricardo Delgado, the former mayor of this municipal district, emphasized that the purpose of the operation is to begin to bring Nicolas Maduro’s usurpation of power to an end. (...) His text messages read: ‘Our officers deserve all possible support.’ (...) ‘We must not let the people who are giving their lives for Venezuela’s freedom die.’ (...) ‘There are now 30 indigenous reserve troops from Luepa who have joined a group of lieutenants.’ Source: El Impulso, 2019.

"The Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela categorically rejects the decision by the Federative Republic of Brazil to grant refugee status to the five terrorists materially responsible for the assault against the Mariano Montilla 513th Jungle Infantry Battalion located at Luepa, in the Gran Sabana of the state of Bolívar, on this past 22 December 2019, where 120 assault rifles and 9 rocket launchers were stolen in a violent operation where a soldier of our Bolivarian National Armed Force lost his life.” Source: Albaciudad 2019.
“The rebel lieutenants stated in that same video that the weapons they had taken ‘will be used for the people’s protection’ and gave assurances that they had not been disbanded, despite statements made by the regime. ‘Venezuela’s liberation by the only possible means, which all of you have chosen, has only just begun,’ they forewarned. The video was released hours after the Brazilian government had announced that the five Venezuelan military officers situated in an indigenous reservation, and wanted by Maduro, had initiated the necessary procedures for being received as refugees in that country.” Source: ATodoMomento 2019.
2. Photographs of mines along the Caroní River and Warimba. Rafts along the Carrao River (Arenal)

Caño Negro Stream, Caroní River. Photos taken by an anonymous source for this report.
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Warimba mine, sector Karrao River 2. Photos taken by an anonymous source for this report.
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