

Stories from the frontline of deforestation

The Guarani People, Brazil

The Guarani are one of the most populous Indigenous Peoples of Brazil, whose ancestral territory is in Brazil's Atlantic Forest.⁴⁶ The Atlantic Forest contains about 5 per cent of the world's biodiversity in plant and animal species and is considered a priority region for environmental conservation – one of the five global hotspots.⁴⁷ The forest's rivers and springs are responsible for the vast majority of Brazil's freshwater supply, serving 130 million people.⁴⁸ However, the Atlantic Forest and the Indigenous people who inhabit this biome are threatened by the expansion of agribusiness in the region, especially soy monoculture. Historically, the forest used to cover 1.2 million km² – about a quarter the size of the Amazon. Today, after centuries of deforestation, land-use change and urban expansion, less than 10 per cent of this precious habitat remains in protected areas and patches of fragmented forest,⁴⁹ often surrounded by mono-crop plantations.

In Guarani culture, people's lives are intertwined and connected to the lives of all other beings in the forest. They don't see

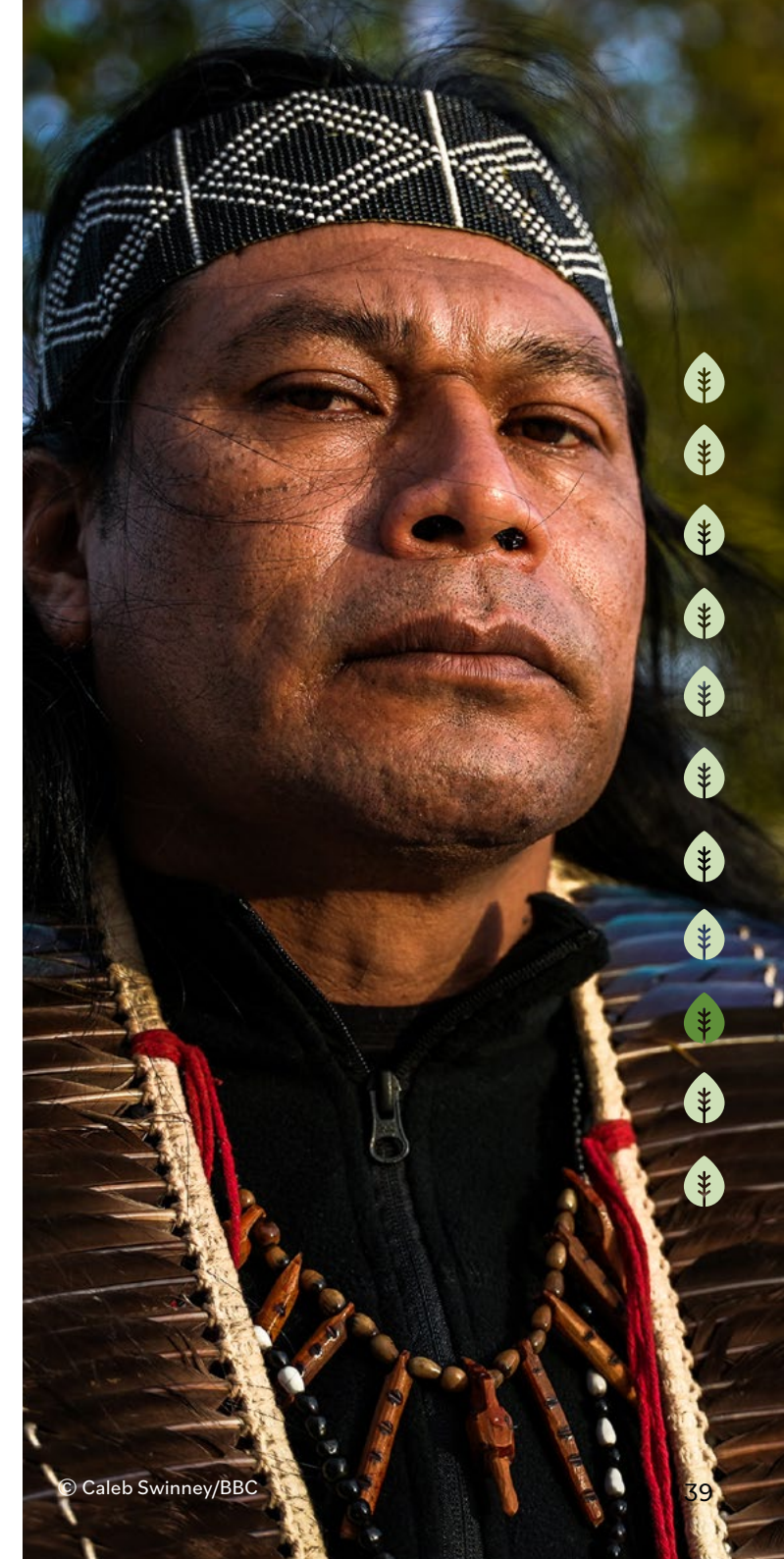
themselves as separate from nature. They feed, protect and respect the earth, plants, animals and insects, regarding their lives as equal and never seeking to gain power over nature, nor to exploit it.

“To maintain, our nhandereko - our way of life - the forests and all their beings must also be kept alive.”

Indigenous leader, from the Comissao Guarani Yvyrupa

However, powerful economic forces are destroying and exploiting the forest for soy production. The Guarani fight to protect their lands and, as a result, they experience discrimination, abuse, threats and intimidation daily.⁵⁰

Many have been murdered, and if their villages are close to soy plantations, they are routinely sprayed with pesticides, affecting the health of their children, plants and animals. Spiritual landmarks have been flooded and villages



destroyed to grow crops such as soybeans, which are exported and used as animal feed.

“In Brazil, the Indigenous peoples, the original peoples of this land, have always suffered a lot of violence. They lost their lands and were murdered because of colonization. And today, our rights are still being attacked. Our lands and our forests continue to be destroyed. And we even lost our lives because of very powerful economic interests.”

Indigenous leader, from the
Commissao Guarani Yvyrupa

To protect their culture, existence, and as such, their forests, the Guarani people need the global support of governments, NGOs, businesses and civil society. The Guarani people call on people worldwide to support their struggle to protect forests and restore their ancestral lands - to listen to the voices of those who have a unique knowledge of how to care for forests. For businesses this means respecting internationally recognised human rights frameworks, such as the

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. It means ensuring that the products and commodities they buy, such as soy, do not infringe upon these rights. For example, requiring suppliers to have full traceability of their forest-risk supply chains or documentation of Free, Prior and Informed Consent for commodities grown on Indigenous lands. It means doing all they can within their operations and procurement practice to reduce tropical deforestation and land conversion to protect Indigenous communities and tackle the climate and nature crises.

These are real ways to strengthen the protection of the place where we all live - the forests, the rivers. This fight is not just for the Guarani people, but for everyone. It is a fight for the good life, a fight for the life of the Planet.

