

The Ayoreo People:

An introduction to some of the Amazon's last remaining Indigenous Peoples living in voluntary isolation.

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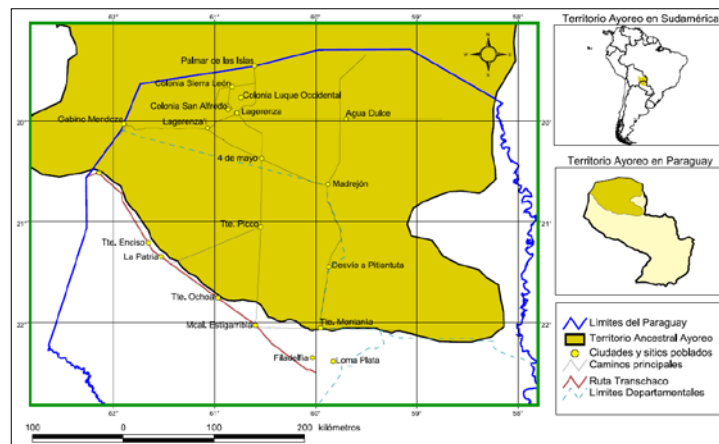
This introduction accompanies the ‘Ayoreo Photo Story’: a short report produced by Ayoreo community members telling the story of their Ayoreo brothers and sisters still living in voluntary isolation within an ICCA (Indigenous Peoples’ and Community Conserved Area and Territory) of the Chaco Region of the Amazon basin.

Both this introduction and Photo Story are designed to raise awareness of the Ayoreo people’s situation whilst ensuring their privacy and choice to remain un-contacted is respected and properly understood. The Photo Story forms part of a wider [ICCA Consortium initiative](#) to use visual media for shedding light on the types of threats facing ICCAs across the world today and highlighting how Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities are actively conserving and defending them.

Photos are courtesy of Ayoreo community members and Miguel Lovera.

The Ayoreo's story

Traditional Ayoreo Territory covers over 30 Million hectares between Paraguay and Bolivia in the Amazon basin. The Ayoreo live in the dense, semiarid bush and forests of the Chaco Region which covers most of the northern portion of the Gran Chaco region of South America, bordered by the



A map showing Ayoreo territory in Paraguay



Deforestation in Ayoreo territory

Paraguay, Pilcomayo, Parapetí and Río Grande Rivers. The Ayoreo community in voluntary isolation today is a small proportion of the wider Ayoreo indigenous community of this vast region and have earned a reputation as a minority group of brave warrior people who managed to remain free from colonial exploitation for many centuries.

Other Ayoreo members have not shared the same fate however. Up until the 1930's, the Ayoreo generally lived undisturbed within their natural surroundings despite efforts to forcefully settle beginning in the seventeenth century. Through the unrelenting efforts of missionaries from Mennonite

and Evangelist religious sects, as well as the Paraguayan Government, Ayoreo community members were forced out of their territory and forced to live in confined settlements. This led to a dramatic shift in Ayoreo customary law and cultural traditions within the community.

Currently their territory, - particularly within the Paraguayan region - is being deforested at an alarming rate in order to clear land for cattle ranching and other commercial agriculture and vegetable oil production. Cattle ranches pose the greatest threat to the livelihoods of the Ayoreo, as most deforestation occurs in order to expand existing ranches and develop new ones.



Ayoreo ancestral land cleared for cattle paddocks

The Ayoreo Photo Story

The Ayoreo Photo Story shows what the Ayoreo people, within the Union of Native Ayoreo People of Paraguay (UNAP) are doing to recover their land and dignity, which are, as they say, the essential elements of their territory. The Union of Ayoreo People is actively defending the rights of their relatives who live in voluntary isolation. This work has four main aspects: 1) to rescue Ayoreo traditional knowledge; 2) environmental monitoring; 3) assessment of the presence of isolated people and 4) administrative and political interaction with the national society.

The Photo Story, prepared by the Ayoreo Union itself explaining how their ICCA is threatened by massive deforestation and describes the impacts this so called 'development' might have on their people, especially their relatives living in voluntary isolation, and what steps are needed to protect these unique peoples and their ICCA.



An Ayoreo community member performing a traditional song

Ayoreo territory today

Most of the Ayoreo people were taken out of their ancestral Ayoreo territories (ICCA) and were 'reduced' to the nineteen settlements shown below. The way of living they now practice is completely estranged to them. Culturally they used to practice a nomadic hunter-gatherer lifestyle but now almost all of them are sedentary. They once used their natural environments to feed-off and to harvest natural medicine for healing; a practice which is dying by the day. Access to those natural resources is drastically restricted, if not totally forbidden in many cases due to privatization of virtually all of their land.

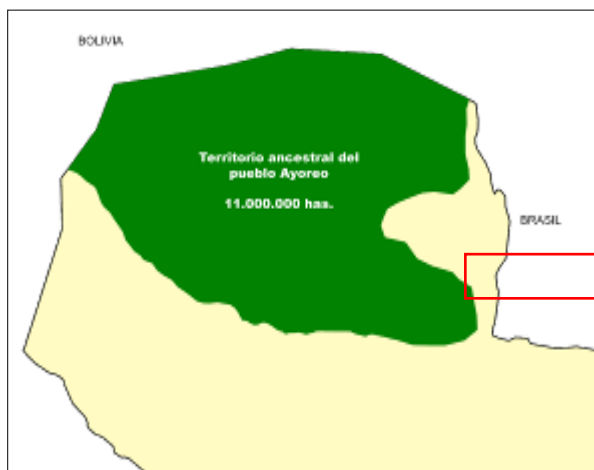


Fences dividing communities and preventing migration and Hunter/Gatherer lifestyles

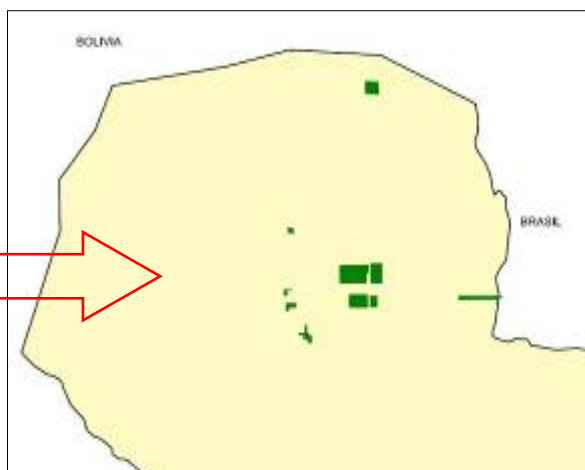


19 settlements of Ayoreo communities no longer living in isolation from the outside world

Those living in voluntary isolation still use the same migratory routes they have used for generations. These however are becoming increasingly disturbed and fragmented by outside forces restricting the movement of Ayoreo members. Fences, roads, buildings established by encroaching extractive industries has finally begun to inhibit Ayoreo members from practicing traditional Hunter-Gatherer ways. The maps below show the surface coverage of ancestral Ayoreo territory in 19th century compared to the surface coverage of ancestral al Ayoreo territory today. The contrast is dramatic and the implications behind it are undeniably negative for Ayoreo communities today, both in and out of isolation. Ayoreo Indigenous People are being increasingly evicted from their ancestral territories for the sake of natural resources extraction and other commercial enterprises. This not only has a detrimental effect on the equilibrium of natural ecosystems in the area, but is also having adverse consequences on the cultural and social dynamics of the Ayoreo communities themselves.



Ancestral Ayoreo territory 11,000,000 hectares



Remaining Ayoreo land 190,000 hectares



Clearing Ayoreo land for cattle grazing



Surface fragmentation for gas and oil exploration



Sorghum field for cattle fodder

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For more information on ICCAs, visit www.iccaconsortium.org