



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

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Agenda item 2

**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner  
for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the  
High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

### **Written statement\* submitted by Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[23 May 2022]

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\* Issued as received, in the language of submission only. The views expressed in the present document do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations or its officials.

## **Indigenous Land Rights: Paraguay's Silent Ethnocide of the Manjui People**

With great concern, Society for Threatened Peoples has been observing the alarming situation of the Manjui in the Republic of Paraguay. The Manjui of the Paraguayan Chaco have been threatened by silent ethnic cleansing for many decades. The Manjui are a small ethnic group with their own language (belonging to the Mataguayo language family) whose homeland is the natural dry forests of Paraguay's northern Chaco, close to the Bolivian and Argentinean borders. Their habitat is the area of the Upper Pilcomayo River and the northwest of the Central Chaco of Paraguay (today's Departamento Boquerón).

Companies have largely destroyed the dry jungle and thus the livelihoods of the Manjui population. Due to the steadily shrinking habitat over many decades and the lack of access to land, since the 1980s the only means of survival for most families has been wage labour in private companies due to migration to the Chaco Central.

Their loss of their ancestral lands leads to wide displacement. Decades ago, their land was illegally taken over by land grabbers and is still used by them for cattle ranching and charcoal production. However the Indigenous Institute INDI actually bought 38,406 hectares of land in 1998 to hand it over to the Manjui. To date, the Manjui have not received their land.

However, after almost 24 years, not only has this land not been handed over to the Manjui, additionally the state institutions have allowed a considerable part of this land to be irregularly usurped by neighbouring non-indigenous private companies. Approximately 40% of the forest has been destroyed.

Since that several state authorities including the judiciary were involved into irregularities and alleged criminal offences. In addition official maps have been lost in public institutions and therefore the land has never been physically demarcated by INDI.

Since the Chaco War (1932 to 1935), the Manjui have been extremely marginalised within the State of Paraguay. Missing land titles led to conflicts with private landowners and high poverty. Persistent high child mortality followed by family planning policies of the Ministry of Health. Missionaries of the evangelical US-American mission "To the New Tribes" (today: Ethnos360) began contacting the Manjui in the 1970s, buying parts of their land in order to re-educate and christianise them.

Until 2018, any parts of their traditional territory was officially acknowledged. In 2018, they managed to transfer the land of the former mission (12,254 hectares) to Wonta (Santa Rosa). Wonta is the largest community and the only one where the Manjui language is still spoken.

There are only three municipalities left: Wonta (Santa Rosa) - located as the only one in the traditional territory. Outside are the Comunidad Manjui de San Agustín (Pedro P. Peña area) and the urban landless community of Abizais (near Mariscal). Even though there are still about 900 Manjui in Paraguay, their language Tsoloti is dead among many young people.

Society for Threatened Peoples calls on the Human Rights Council to urge the Paraguayan State:

- To undertake an expeditious and fair review of the 1998 indigenous land recognition process - and in the case of a positive decision:
  - o To immediately hand over the 38,406 hectares. For the Manjui, their own land is a source of identity and contributes to the preservation of their language, culture and tradition as well as to secure their food supply.

o To compensate for the damage caused during these 24 years. A large part of the forest area and thus an essential part of the Manjui's territories were destroyed;

• To observe and monitor following actions made by the Paraguayan Indigenous Institute INDI (Instituto Paraguayo del Indígena).

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