

“In the heart of Indigenous History Month and Pride Month... June 2021 has many people feeling a complex range of emotions from grief to celebration as "BC's" restart plan continues to progress. An event relating both of these commemorations to COVID-19 this Saturday 1 p.m at the Vancouver Art Gallery will be a protesting march co-led by LGBTQI2+ Latin migrants and Indigenous Peoples, drawing attention to Brazil's dire COVID-19 state under President Jair Bolsonaro, in solidarity with protests occurring the same day, June 19th, initiated by Brazilians around the globe. The cross community efforts will be highlighting the necessity for international solidarity across settler-made countries from Canada to Brazil and beyond that do not adequately respond to the needs of the public, specifically from the pandemic's disproportionate negative impacts for people that are racialized, gendered, sexualized, and/or disabled.” – Q'áñiáglis

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Brazil's COVID-19 crisis: activists march from Vancouver Art Gallery to Sunset Beach, calling for President Jair Bolsonaro's impeachment

At nearly half a million lives lost to the pandemic, Brazil has the second highest COVID-19 death toll in the world, just after the USA, but is ahead in deaths per capita and Brazilians say enough is enough

Vancouver, BC, June 17, 2021 – Tens of thousands of people gathered across 213 cities in Brazil and 17 abroad last May 29th, to demand the impeachment of President Jair Bolsonaro for his handling of the pandemic and more. Brazilians in Vancouver did their part [that day](#).

This upcoming June 19th, Brazilians around the world, with the support of [FIBRA](#) (Brazilian International Front against the Coup) and [Povo na Rua](#) (People on the Street), join forces to repeat the message. The movement is happening in at least [50 cities](#), including New York, Washington, Boston, Buenos Aires, Amsterdam, Berlin, London, Madrid, Lisbon, Montreal, Toronto and more. Those in Vancouver shall once again do their part and will rally at Vancouver Art Gallery's North Plaza at 1 p.m. Link to the official event [here](#).

The first order of business will be native land acknowledgment with Q'áñiáglis, from the Heiltsuk and Nisga'a nations, who will talk about how our different causes are connected. Then, Bruno Tadeu and Celo Vieira will teach some of our Brazilian instruments workshop at 1:30. The crowd will start marching on Robson St. at 2:30, take a turn at Denman St. towards English Bay and then end at Sunset Beach. The protest is planned to be concluded at 5 p.m.

We are following current BC Health guidelines and expect everyone to wear masks and social distance accordingly. As of now, there are under 50 people confirmed for the event, but we are prepared to sort multiple 50-people groups and keep them properly separated. Volunteers will reinforce those guidelines and provide additional masks and hand sanitizers when necessary.

Why is the president of Brazil responsible for the country's COVID-19 crisis?

With a collapsing health system across the country and accusations of genocide, not only has President Jair Bolsonaro failed to fulfill his role as national leader in handling the crises, but has also consistently contributed to worsen it. He downplayed the pandemic from the very start, [calling coronavirus a "little flu"](#); invested resources in [acquiring hydroxychloroquine](#), when it was already clearly and scientifically proven to be ineffective against COVID-19; and just recently got [fined for not wearing a mask \(again\)](#), this time during one of his motorcycle rallies.

Meanwhile, the current daily average for COVID-19 related deaths in Brazil is nearly 2000 and [peaked at over 4000 just last April](#).

When vaccines were starting to become available worldwide in 2020, the Bolsonaro government made clear efforts to avoid opportunities for Brazil, [ignoring multiple offers from Pfizer](#), for example. Current investigations are suggesting [81 failed attempts](#) from that company alone. The president went so far as to even claim the [Pfizer vaccine could turn people into crocodiles](#).

Now that Brazil has begun vaccination – thanks to Sinovac and AstraZeneca – later than needed, Bolsonaro wants to [allow vaccinated people to not wear face masks](#), regardless of where the country is at for actual herd immunity, which is still far from achieved.

The complete disregard for official scientific authorities is so commonplace, that Bolsonaro received a suggestion to create a "shadow cabinet" of alternative scientists to provide advice about vaccination. That suggestion was given by virologist Paulo Zanutto, who recently said he was invited to teach at Vancouver's BCIT, as [reported by the Vancouver Sun](#) on June 11th. A [Senate inquiry](#), aimed at examining the Bolsonaro government's questionable response to the COVID-19 pandemic, now lists Zanutto as one of the investigated parties, according to a [report](#) from Brazilian media this June 17th.

Moreover, when dealing with the Brazilian Ministry of Health, Bolsonaro has proven to be uncooperative and authoritarian, not to mention misleading when talking about the crisis. A [story](#) on Polygraph.info explains just how far the mismanagement has gone.

"Since the beginning of the pandemic, two Brazilian health ministers left their posts amid disagreements with the president about isolation measures and the use of hydroxychloroquine, an unproven treatment. His third health minister, an army general who specializes in logistics and has no experience in health care, left his post in March amid investigations into his handling of the health care in Manaus. The health ministry is now being led by a fourth minister, Marcelo Queiroga."

Manaus is the Amazonian city where the [P.1 variant](#) of the coronavirus was first reported in Brazil. The state of Amazonas, of which Manaus is the capital, has several indigenous communities, some still uncontacted and isolated.

Those communities, as well as hundreds other indigenous peoples throughout Brazil, face the COVID-19 pandemic amid pre-existing systemic issues. As [CTV News explained](#) in March, “the virus has disproportionately burdened Brazil's Indigenous population, who have already been facing the deforestation of the Amazon rainforest. Brazil's Indigenous People Articulation says that over 51,000 Indigenous people of Brazil have tested positive while 1,022 have died. The highest number of deaths are centred in the state of Amazonas, where 242 Indigenous people have died.”

Underreporting of COVID-19 cases among racial minorities in the country is another big issue. According to [one study](#), the Brazilian government undercounts indigenous deaths from the disease by half. Even with the pandemic, the Indigenous health budget is the lowest it's been in eight years. [Another study](#) points out that the Brazilian black population has a 1.5-fold increased mortality risk from COVID-19, due to racial disparities.

Bolsonaro's response to criticism

The president of Brazil is not budging on his position and never has, even now that he is being investigated in a Senate inquiry. As New York Time's Vanessa Barbara [describes](#), “the inquiry is a weirdly fascinating display of evasion, ineptitude and outright lies”.

The reality is that Bolsonaro does not want to own up to his appalling actions and is using anything in his power of office to deflect criticism. The Intercept's Andrew Fishman goes into further detail of the president's [crackdown on dissent](#).

“In recent months, Bolsonaro has increasingly taken to the courts to stifle dissent among prominent adversaries. Critics of the president — including journalists, politicians, Indigenous leaders, YouTubers, professors, and activists — have been investigated under the dictatorship-era National Security Law, which is widely considered unconstitutional.”

One of those YouTubers is Felipe Neto, who explained to the New York Times how [Trump wasn't the worse pandemic president](#).

Fake news, another tool Bolsonaro uses, is nothing new to Brazilians and involves those closest to him — friendly bloggers, wealthy businessmen, close aides and even his own children. The Washington Post talks about what came to be known as the [“office of hate”](#).

Other alarming matters

Outside of the already outrageous pandemic context, Brazilians have had to deal with additional damage from the Bolsonaro government, just as alarming and worsened by the COVID-19 crisis.

This includes the Amazon Rainforest, which has never been more threatened. In May of 2020, Brazilian Environment Minister Ricardo Salles [called for environmental deregulation](#), saying the timing was good because people were distracted by the coronavirus pandemic. One year later, [deforestation has soared 67%](#), according to Brazil's national space research institute INPE, with much of the land targeted for cattle ranches, farms, logging and mining.

In April of 2019, thousands of indigenous people rallied at the national capital, Brasília, to protest a decision to transfer responsibility for demarcation of indigenous reserves to Brazil's agriculture ministry, which is controlled by members of a powerful farming lobby that has long opposed

indigenous land rights. As [The Guardian pointed out](#) at the time, Bolsonaro and his environment minister, Ricardo Salles, have both publicly attacked Brazil's environmental protection agencies and what they call "an industry" of environmental fines.

Just in the last couple of months, Minister Salles was [probed for timber trafficking](#) and President Bolsonaro approved a [24% cut to the environment budget for 2021](#) from the previous year's level – only a couple of days after [pledging otherwise](#) at a summit organised by US President Joe Biden.

Another alarming matter faced during the Bolsonaro government was in January of 2020, when the [culture secretary got fired after echoing words of Nazi Goebbels](#). Since taking office, Bolsonaro has been repeatedly criticized by opponents for pushing a conservative cultural agenda while [cutting funding to arts and cinema projects](#).

Furthermore, in June of 2020, Brazilian Education Minister Carlos Decotelli quit just five days after he was appointed and before being sworn in, [over an inflated resume](#). He was even accused of plagiarising his master degree's thesis. Decotelli was Bolsonaro's third education minister since his term began in January of 2019. The first served for just three months and the second, Abraham Weintraub, for 14 months.

Bolsonaro has failed to address the huge impact of COVID-19 on education, leaving millions of children with little or no access to school, [say Human Rights Watch and Everyone for Education \(Todos pela Educação\)](#). More than a year after the government ordered the initial closure of schools due to the pandemic, the Education Ministry, now led by Milton Ribeiro, urgently needs to increase support to states and municipalities to guarantee remote education, including online learning, and a safe return to schools.

Yet another matter of concern is the relationship Jair Bolsonaro has with Brazil's evangelical churches, which he indirectly tried to [exempt from social distancing measures](#) during the pandemic. As [CTV News describes](#), "the conservative president, a proud Christian who has the support of some of the country's main evangelical leaders, has opposed locally imposed lockdowns".

Bolsonaro's Minister of Women, Family and Human Rights, evangelical pastor Damares Alves, is accused of [preventing the abortion of a 10-year-old rape victim](#). She has also made notorious and discriminatory declarations against the queer community. On her first day in office, Alves stated that under the new government "girls will be princesses and boys will be princes", in a swipe at what she called "ideological indoctrination". Later, she said ["boys wear blue and girls wear pink"](#). Rights campaigners say these types of comments add further weight to the fiercely anti-LGBTQI2+ propaganda perpetuated by Brazil's powerful evangelical churches.

But what could you expect from Minister Damares Alves, if the Brazilian president himself has made numerous discriminatory statements over the years? When in January of 2019, just after taking office, Bolsonaro said he would prefer his son "died in an accident" than bringing home a boyfriend, LGBTQI2+ issues were swiftly removed from the human rights ministry's mandate.

The total absence of resources for queer people in Brazil persists during the pandemic and the transgender community is taking the biggest hit. Last September, [Reuters pointed out](#) that the number of transgender people killed in Brazil rose 70% from 2019 to 2020, according to the National Association of Travestis and Transsexuals (ANTRA), a local activist organization.

[A more recent study](#) from the same association exposes an even more alarming reality, when considering data from previous years in comparison with 2021. According to this newer study, between 2008 and 2020, the yearly average of transgender targeted murders in Brazil was 122.5, which is approximately 10.2 per month. What researchers observe now is that the monthly average has gone up to 14 murders. This means that the new yearly average for transgender targeted killing in Brazil has increased by 37% in 2021.

Jair Bolsonaro's hatred for the queer community has always been evident, even back in 2013, when he was still only a congressman. At the time, British actor and comedian Stephen Fry [interviewed him](#) for the BBC program *Out There*. Just before the Brazilian 2018 elections, Fry even made an emotional plea, [begging Brazilians not to vote Bolsonaro for president](#).

Canadian actor and producer Elliot Page has also confronted Bolsonaro, when [the two talked about homophobia in 2016](#). That conversation is one of many included in Elliot Page's production *Gaycation*, in which he explored queer communities worldwide, and can be accessed [here](#).

More information about Jair Bolsonaro's countless hateful statements, which also include (but are not limited to) misogyny and racism, can be found [here](#).

If all this was not enough, the Brazilian president has even been mentioned to have [connections with the political assassination of human rights activist Marielle Franco](#) in 2018. Openly bisexual and married to [Monica Benicio](#) at the time, Marielle was a 38-year-old black woman who served as a city councillor for Rio de Janeiro, advocating for disadvantaged people in the favelas, home to almost one-quarter of the city's population, where grinding poverty, police brutality and shootouts with drug gangs are routine.

Even though [two ex-police officers were arrested over the murder](#), there are still unanswered questions about the case to this day. In life, Marielle Franco had criticised police killings in the favelas where she grew up and took part in a 2008 state legislature inquiry into the paramilitary gangs that dominate large areas of Rio state. Known as militias, these groups often include police officers and have [ties to Bolsonaro](#).

Last November, widow Monica Benicio [won a Rio city council seat](#) and vowed to fight for justice and LGBTQI2+ rights.

Conclusion

With all mentioned and the acknowledgment that there are still developing facts, such as the [controversial hosting of soccer tournament Copa America in Brazil](#), we pledge to peacefully demand, for as long as necessary, the removal of Jair Bolsonaro from the presidency of Brazil, so that we may halt the rampant loss of lives nationwide, due to extreme federal mismanagement of the COVID-19 crisis and otherwise.

The complex story of how Bolsonaro came to power can be understood by watching Netflix's documentary [The Edge of Democracy](#).