# **Exclusive-First Brazil Logging Raids Under Lula Aim To Curb Amazon Deforestation**

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Brazil's first raids against illegal ***deforestation*** in the ***Amazon*** rainforest under President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva were underway on Thursday, after the new leader's pledge to end destruction that surged under his predecessor Jair Bolsonaro.

Reuters exclusively accompanied raids led by environmental agency Ibama in the rainforest state of Para to stop loggers and ranchers illegally clearing the forest. The agency has also launched raids this week in the states of Roraima and Acre, Ibama environmental enforcement coordinator Tatiane Leite said.

About 10 Ibama agents set out in pickup trucks on Thursday from their base in the municipality of Uruara, Para, along with a dozen federal police, heading toward an indigenous reserve where satellite images showed loggers and ranchers recently at work clearing the forest illegally. The mission aims to stop or scare off loggers to avoid further incursions into the forest and to issue fines to those caught with illegal wood.

The Bolsonaro government had gutted staff and funding for environmental enforcement by Ibama in his four years in office, while the former president criticized the agency for issuing fines to farmers and miners.

Bolsonaro gave the military and later the Justice Ministry authority over operations to fight ***deforestation***, sidelining Ibama despite the agency's extensive experience and success in fighting the destruction of the ***Amazon***.

An area larger than Denmark was deforested under Bolsonaro, a 60% increase from the prior four years.

Lula on the campaign trail last year pledged to put Ibama back in charge of combating ***deforestation*** with beefed-up funding and personnel. He took office on Jan. 1, so additional money and staff have yet to reach the front-line enforcers. But Ibama agents told Reuters that they already felt more empowered by Lula announcing environmental protection as a top priority.

Bolsonaro's government denied several requests by Reuters to accompany Ibama missions during his 2019-2022 administration. His government instituted a gag order forbidding Ibama agents from speaking to the press, which agents say has already been reversed under Lula.

"Publicizing raids to dissuade environmental criminals is already a big change. That didn't happen in the previous government, whose goal was to show that we weren't doing anything," said Givanildo dos Santos Lima, the agent leading Ibama's Uruara mission.

Lula took office for the first time in 2003 when ***Amazon*** ***deforestation*** was near all-time highs, and through strict enforcement of environmental laws reduced it by 72% to a near record low when he left office in 2010.

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