# **Ibama conducts the first operations of the Lula administration against deforestation in the Amazon**

CE Noticias Financieras English

January 20, 2023 Friday

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**Length:** 674 words

**Body**

Brazilian environmental agents cut through the forest with machetes on Thursday (19) in search of criminals in the first anti-***deforestation*** operations of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (PT), who has vowed to stop the increasing destruction inherited from his predecessor, Jair Bolsonaro (PL).

Reuters followed exclusively the raids led by Ibama (Brazilian Institute of Environment and Renewable Natural Resources) in the ***Amazon*** rainforest in the state of Pará to stop loggers and ranchers from illegally cutting down the forest.

Ibama also launched raids this week in the states of Roraima and Acre, said the environmental enforcement coordinator, Tatiane Leite.

About ten Ibama agents set off in pickup trucks Thursday from their base in the municipality of Uruará in Pará, along with a dozen federal police officers, toward a cluster of points where satellite images showed loggers and ranchers recently working on illegal logging.

In 12 hours of driving along dirt roads that illegally cut through an indigenous reserve, the convoy reached five areas that were deforested and burned at the time of last October's election, which pitted Lula against Bolsonaro.

All the areas are within the Cachoeira Seca Indigenous Land, where ***deforestation*** is strictly prohibited.

Four of the tracts appeared to have been subsequently abandoned, with no signs of people living nearby or in the process of turning them into farms. Agents said it could be a sign that illegal ranchers have given up investing time and money to turn illegal land into productive pastures, knowing that Lula campaigned on a promise to crack down on ***deforestation***.

"People know that in this government the inspection will be stricter and will not allow them to use an area that they illegally deforested," said Givanildo dos Santos Lima, an agent leading Ibama's mission in Uruara.

"If the other government had won, you would have found people here, well-manicured pastures and cattle."

Bolsonaro's government had cut staff and funds for environmental enforcement at Ibama in his four years in office, while the former president criticized the body for issuing fines to ranchers and miners.

Bolsonaro gave the military and then the Justice Ministry authority over operations to combat ***deforestation***, sidelining Ibama, despite the agency's vast experience and success in combating the destruction of the ***Amazon***.

An area larger than Denmark has been deforested under Bolsonaro, a 60% increase over the previous four years.

In another area of the reserve, agents found a newly built house with several chainsaws and food stockpiled for weeks, indicating that the occupants had likely fled shortly before Ibama arrived.

Flanked by police officers with semi-automatic weapons, the environmental agents made their way through the surrounding jungle to reach an area the size of 57 soccer fields filled with downed trees and piled up logs.

Some wildly planted corn stalks were knee-high in what appeared to be an attempt to claim the area and then turn it into cattle pasture, the agents said.

"We're going to come back with a helicopter and take them by surprise," Lima said.

He was optimistic that Ibama will be able to carry out more raids in Lula's government, with the aim of fining deforesters and preventing criminals from trying to clear more areas.

In last year's election campaign, Lula promised to put Ibama back in charge of fighting ***deforestation***, with increased funding and personnel. He took office on January 1, so additional money and staff have yet to reach the inspectors on the front lines.

The Bolsonaro administration has denied several requests by Reuters to monitor Ibama missions during his administration in 2019-2022. His administration instituted an injunction prohibiting Ibama agents from talking to the press, which officials say has already been revoked.

Lula first took office in 2003, when ***Amazon*** ***deforestation*** was near an all-time high, and through strict enforcement of environmental laws reduced it by 72 percent to a near-record level when he left office in 2010.

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