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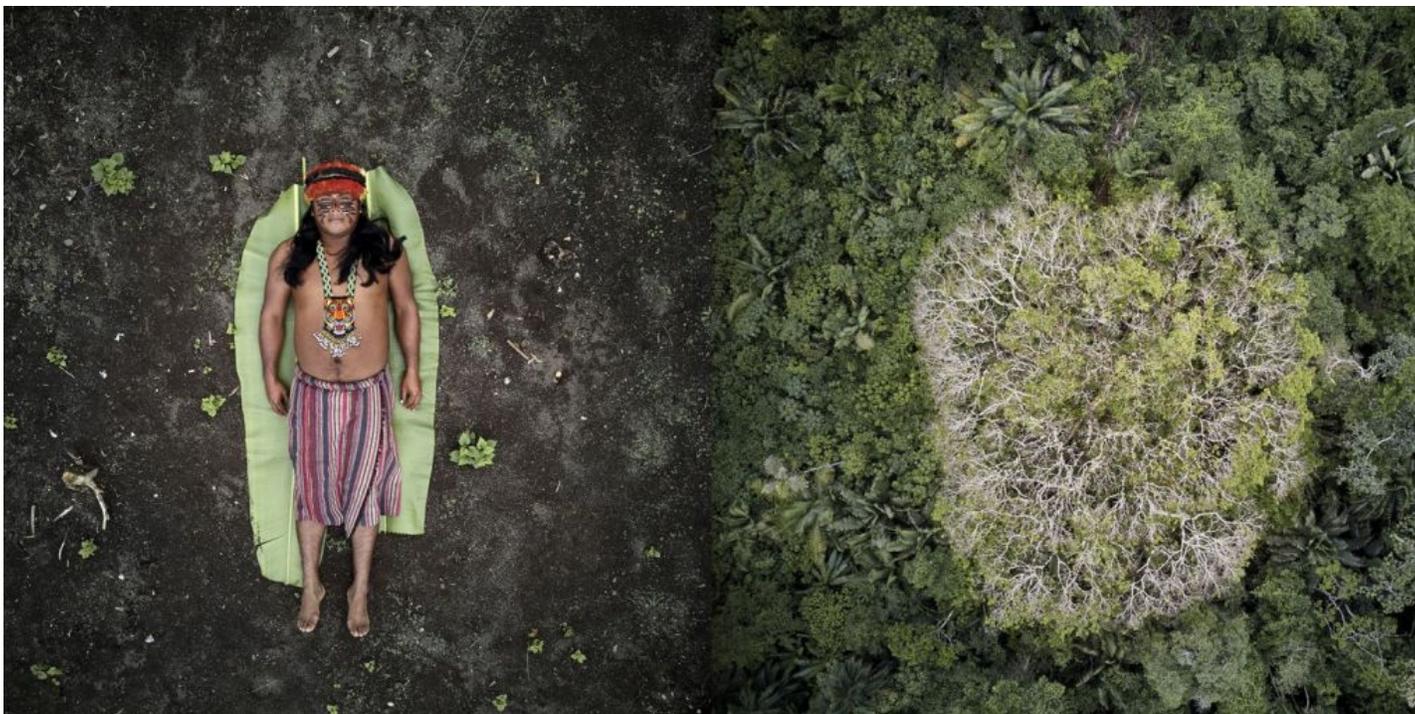


STORY

The Amazon's Defenders

April 15, 2020 | *The Washington Post* (<https://pulitzercenter.org/publications/washington-post>)

BY FRANCESC BADIA I DALMASES & PABLO ALBARENGA (PHOTOS)



José juxtaposed with the Achuar rainforest in Ecuador. Image by Pablo Albarenga. Ecuador, 2019.

In 2017, the year I began this photographic project, at least 201 land and environmental defenders worldwide lost their lives while protecting their communities and regions from the ravages of mining, agribusiness, logging and other environmentally devastating industries. According to the human rights and

environmental organization Global Witness, the majority of the deaths were in Latin America, where 57 defenders perished in Brazil alone, 80 percent of them killed while defending a part of the Amazon rainforest.

Despite this alarming situation, the indigenous communities of Latin America are undaunted and continue to protect their territory against development projects that exploit a region's natural resources without consideration for its history or culture. Traditional populations, bound to the sacred land where generations of their ancestors lived and are buried, refuse to abandon it, even after it has been largely destroyed. This photo essay seeks to illuminate the powerful connection between land defenders and the territories they so fiercely champion.

JOSÉ

José (pictured at top) is one of the leaders of the Achuar indigenous people in the Sharamentsa community in Ecuador. He defends his rainforest by generating projects in collaboration with external organizations. One of his aims is to create an indigenous group to monitor its territory on the ground and with aerial technology such as drones. José, in traditional Achuar clothing, lies on a banana leaf in his yard. He is paired with a photo of the Achuar rainforest near his house.



Image by Pablo Albarenga. Ecuador, 2019.

TUPI

Tupi, 29, is the first person in her village to assert that she has faced violence directed against her as a woman — the first step in addressing this type of violence in the village of San Francisco in Tapajós-Arapiuns Extractive Reserve in Brazil.

As a Tupinamba, she has encouraged other indigenous women to tell their stories and fight the gender violence embedded in a patriarchal society. Tupi leads a support group composed entirely of indigenous women. Tupi is photographed in her village. She is juxtaposed with an image of the territory she defends: her body and the bodies of indigenous women.



Image by Pablo Albarenga. Ecuador, 2019.

EDNEI

Ednei, 20, is a young Arapiun leader who has recently joined the land guard team in the Indigenous Territory of Maró (TI Maró) in Brazil. The team monitors the rainforest, watching for illegal loggers and poachers stealing from their sacred land. The territory covers about 10,000 acres of pristine rainforest. Ednei lies along the tracks left in the road by loggers driving close to the territory borders. His portrait is paired with an image of giant logs captured by the land guard team during one of its surveillance rounds. Measuring as much as six feet in diameter, the logs are left to rot to fertilize the land.



Image by Pablo Albarenga. Ecuador, 2019.

DRICA

Drica, 29, lives in Tapagem, a quilombo along the Trombetas River in the Brazilian Amazon. The territories known as quilombos are home to descendants of escaped African slaves, living deep inside the rainforest for protection. Drica is the first woman elected territory coordinator, representing five communities. They face threats from mining, logging and a huge dam project, which if approved could not only harm the environment but also displace the communities. Drica is photographed in her ancestral land. With Drica's portrait is an aerial view of a bauxite mine next to the territory.



Image by Pablo Albarenga. Ecuador, 2019.

VERO

Vero is an indigenous Achuar woman in Ecuador. To many Achuar women, giving birth is a sacred and solitary act. When it is time to deliver, mothers leave their homes and give birth alone in the rainforest. Many can lose their lives in the process. Vero is part of a project offering health care to women during pregnancy and afterward. She uses modern instruments alongside medicinal Achuar plants traditionally used to care for mothers and babies. Vero lies on her sacred Achuar territory. Paired with Vero's image is a photo of her garden in the rainforest, where many ancestral medicinal plants are grown.

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Photo editing by Dudley M. Brooks. Design by Michael Johnson
(<https://www.washingtonpost.com/people/michael-johnson/>).



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