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**We help tribal peoples
defend their lives, protect
their lands and determine
their own futures.**

President Dilma Rousseff,
President of the Republic,
Gabinete da Presidenta
Palacio do Planalto
Praça dos Três Poderes
Brasília DF 70150-900
Brazil

London, 2 June 2011

Re: Yanomami and Yekuana Health Care

Your Excellency,

Survival International is very concerned about the nomination of Andréia Maia Oliveira as coordinator of the Yanomami and Yekuana Health District (Distrito Sanitário Especial Yanomami e Yekuana - DSEY).

Survival has received disturbing reports and letters from Hutukara Yanomami Association, which represents many Yanomami and Yekuana indigenous communities, the Yanomami and Yekuana District Health Council, and NGOs working with them which reveal that the DSEY is being subjected to political interests and manipulation by politicians in Roraima state, which threaten to damage and undermine vital health care for these peoples.

Last month Senator Romero Jucá Filho (PMDB RR) nominated Andréia Maia Oliveira to coordinate the DSEY. This was done without consulting the Yanomami and Yekuana, despite the fact that prior consultation with the

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Indians on the appointment was guaranteed in a meeting in Brasília between Yanomami representatives and the Health Minister Alexandre Padilha in April 2011.

Antônio Alves, Secretary of the Indigenous Health Secretariat SESAI, attended the Fourth General Assembly of the Hutukara Yanomami Association, in November 2010. He pledged to consult the Yanomami and Yekuana over decisions regarding health policy in the DSEY, and he guaranteed that Joana Claudete Schuertz Mercês would continue to head the DSEY, considering her technical competence and the Yanomami's support for her.

The Yanomami and Yekuana oppose the nomination of Andréia Maia Oliveira and people linked to Senator Romero Jucá. They recall that Andréia is currently the secretary of Marcelo Lopes, regional coordinator of FUNASA/RR. Lopes and his predecessor, Ramiro Teixeira, both appointed by Jucá, were arrested by Federal Police operations (Metástase and Anopheles respectively), accused of embezzling public funds.

Indigenous health care was removed from FUNASA's remit and SESAI was established in 2010 in order to meet the demands of the indigenous leaders, who wanted to improve health care quality and put a stop to corruption.

We fear that if nominations are once again made by politicians, this will undermine SESAI, and could lead once more to chaos and corruption in indigenous health, which SESAI was designed to cut out.

Survival has also received reports that the current regional coordinator of FUNASA-RR, Marcelo Lopes, is offering benefits to leaders who support Andréia Maia Oliveira as coordinator of the DSEY.

Hutukara and the Yanomami and Yekuana District Health Council have written letters and had many meetings with health authorities to express their concerns and indignation. These appear to have fallen on deaf ears. Given the past, they are understandably worried and angry about political interference and the appointment of people who have no experience, interest or knowledge of indigenous health care. They wish the current interim head of the DSEY, Joana Claudete Mercês Schuertz, to remain in this position.

In the last four decades, the Yanomami and Yekuana have suffered some of the worst health problems of any indigenous peoples in the world. They remain very vulnerable peoples and are highly susceptible to serious diseases such as malaria, TB, onchocerciasis and flu which continue to afflict them. It is therefore vital that experienced medical professionals, trained in the special health needs of remote and still relatively isolated indigenous peoples, and who are trusted and supported by the communities, should be able to deliver vital health care without being subjected to political influences.

We urge you and your government to respond to the Yanomami and Yekuana communities' demands to be consulted about and actively participate in their health care. This right is guaranteed in Brazil's constitution, in Convention 169 of the International Labour Organisation, ratified by Brazil in 2002, and in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, approved by Brazil in 2007.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephen Corry". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Stephen Corry
Director

cc:

Sr Alexandre Padilha, Health Minister

Sr Antônio Alves, Secretary of the SESAI

Dr Marcio Meira, President of FUNAI

Sr Diego Victoria, Pan-American Health Organisation coordinator in Brazil

Sr Marcos Antonio Espinal Fuentes, Health Surveillance, Disease Prevention and Control - HSD, Pan-American Health Organisation, Geneva

Dr James Anaya, UN Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Peoples