

Civil society kicks off colorful Rio+20 counter-summit

June 15 2012, by Claire de Oliveira



A Brazilian Indian makes up before the inauguration of the People's Summit in the Flamengo park in Rio de Janeiro. Indigenous and religious groups kicked off a colorful summit as a counterpoint to the Rio+20 conference on sustainable development, calling on nations to do more to protect the planet.

Indigenous and religious groups kicked off a colorful summit Friday as a counterpoint to the Rio+20 conference on sustainable development, calling on nations to do more to protect the planet.

The so-called "People's Summit" got under way at Flamengo park, with the dramatic appearance of 82-year-old Amazonian chief Raoni, stomping and brandishing a club.

"I am still alive to fight against what the white man is doing to us and nature," howled the respected chief of the Kayapo tribe to a crowd of

hundreds of people representing various religious and indigenous groups.

Raoni earned worldwide fame in the 1980s for teaming up with British rock star Sting for his defense of the rights of [indigenous peoples](#).

"Our planet is under threat. The number one enemy of mankind is our current lifestyle," said Professor H.M. Desarda of Hyderabad University in India. "Earth has enough for everyone. Need but not greed."

"We are concerned about the future of the environment. We want to know what governments plan to do with the peoples who have always protected the forest," said Irineu Baniwa, an indigenous Brazilian who came from Sao Gabriel da Cachoeira in the northwestern state of Amazonas bordering Venezuela.



A Brazilian Indian prepares her souvenirs stand before the inauguration of the People's Summit in the Flamengo park in Rio de Janeiro. Indigenous and religious groups kicked off a colorful summit as a counterpoint to the Rio+20 conference on sustainable development, calling on nations to do more to protect the planet.

"We want economic alternatives for the products of our lands," he

added, slamming developed countries for polluting the planet.

Marcelo Rey said he came to Rio to publicize his Afro-Brazilian Candomble religion, which he said "best preserves nature".

"I came here to try to learn about ways of combating climate change. We need to work outside the system and we have a lot to learn from native Indians," said 23-year-old Erynne Gilpin, an indigenous Canadian activist and student from London, Ontario.

Some 400 representatives of 20 Brazilian [indigenous groups](#) including the Guaranis, Tikunas, Tukanos, Gavioes, Kaiapos, Xavantes and Bororos are taking part along with 1,200 natives from Canada, the United States, Colombia and Nicaragua.

Organizers say they expect 15,000 people daily at the gathering, an initiative of 200 ecological groups and social movements from around the world opposing what they view as capitalist attempts to hijack the "green economy" concept.

The concept, meant to reconcile economic growth with poverty eradication and environmental protection, will be hotly debated by 116 world leaders at the official Rio+20 summit on June 20-22.

The UN-sponsored event marks the 20th anniversary of the Earth Summit -- a landmark gathering that opened the debate on the future of the planet and its resources.

Over the next few days, the "People's Summit" will feature several different demonstrations, including a main march expected to draw 50,000 people on June 20, when the official Rio+20 meeting gets under way.

A women's rally is scheduled for Monday along with a rally to protest a new forestry code in Brazil that would ease restrictions on forest protection and which environmentalists sees as a threat to the Amazon rainforest.

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