

# Brazil court suspends decree allowing Amazon reserve mining

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An activist holds a sign that reads "All for the Amazon" during a demonstration by Greenpeace against the Brazilian government's decision to scrap the huge Amazon reserve and allow commercial mining—a decision that is now suspended

A Brazilian court on Wednesday suspended a government decree that would open a huge Amazon reserve to commercial mining, after the initial decision sparked outrage from environmental groups, the Catholic Church and even supermodel Gisele Bundchen.

The federal court in the capital Brasilia said in a statement it had "partially granted an injunction to immediately suspend any administrative act" aimed at scrapping the Denmark-sized reserve, known as Renca.

The order from Judge Rolando Spanholo "suspends possible administrative acts based on the decree" signed by President Michel Temer last week.

Spanholo said that the government had failed to consult Congress, as required under the constitution, and that the decree would "put at risk the environmental protection (of Renca) and the protection of local indigenous communities."

The center-right government's lawyer immediately said it would appeal.

The Renca reserve in the eastern Amazon is home to the indigenous Aparai, Wayana and Wajapi tribes and vast swaths of untouched forest, covering more than 17,800 square miles (46,000 square kilometers).

Temer says that opening up the gold and mineral-rich area to mining is part of his program to boost Brazil's weak economy.

The government insists that vital areas within the reserve, including where indigenous people live, will remain off limits.

However, Greenpeace, the World Wildlife Fund, Bundchen and other celebrities, as well as Brazil's influential Catholic hierarchy, have pushed back in an unusually broad-based campaign for Latin America's biggest country.

## **Troubled decree**

Temer, who came to power a year ago after the impeachment of his leftist predecessor Dilma Rousseff, is attempting to enact austerity cuts and market reforms aimed at loosening up Brazil's moribund economy.

The Renca decision dovetailed with the announcement of sweeping privatizations of state-owned companies, ranging from an airport in Sao Paulo to the national mint, which makes bank notes and passports.

Renca contains important reserves of gold, manganese, iron and copper which until now have been available only to relatively low-level state-owned mining, although illegal miners also operate in the area.

Temer's aggressive push has been widely interpreted, in part, as payback to industrial groups that backed him during a corruption scandal which came close to bringing him down at the start of August.

However, the Renca decree was immediately controversial.

Apparently taken aback by the opposition, the government reissued the decree with far more detail and explanation insisting that the majority of the reserve would still remain protected.

The seven special conservation areas and two tribal homelands inside Renca would not be affected, the government said.

That did not satisfy critics, including the federal prosecutor's office, which said the decree threatened "ecocide," and asked for the court injunction.

Leftist Senator Randolfe Rodrigues described the decree as "the biggest attack on the Amazon in the last 50 years."

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