Brazil farmers deforesting Amazon 'to survive'
27 August 2019, by Carlos Fabal

Thousands of troops and firefighters have been deployed to combat the fires devouring chunks of the Amazon.

On his block of land deep in the Amazon rainforest, Aurelio Andrade says deforestation is the only way he and other farmers can survive in the remote region where fires are raging.

"Here we have no support from the federal government or anyone else, only from God," Andrade tells AFP, wearing an army camouflage T-shirt and matching hat, on his property 120 kilometers (75 miles) from Porto Velho in the northwestern state of Rondonia.

"We cut trees to plant grass to survive, so that the cattle eat," says the portly Andrade, apparently oblivious to the growing global outcry over the worst fires in years.

On the other side of the boundary fence, fire advances across his neighbor's property.

While thousands of troops and firefighters have been deployed to combat the fires devouring chunks of the Amazon, none appear to have made it as far as this area where communications are poor or non-existent.

Andrade is losing sleep worrying that his neighbor's...
fire will cross into his property and he monitors its progress closely.

"I'm scared. Any night you are sleeping that fire could cause a very serious problem," he says.

"During the day, I come to look from here, next to the fence, and see where the smoke is and where the fire is."

Experts say increased land clearing during the months-long dry season to make way for grazing or crops has aggravated this year's fires.

Even small landholders like Andrade have been blamed for fueling the destruction.

But Andrade says they have no choice.

"Even if you take a deserted area you have to clear, burn and make a house where you can live with your children," he says.

“You're not going to make a house in the hollow of a tree, as if you were a bird, right?”

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