Brazil launches plan to expand mining in Amazon

14 February 2022

President Jair Bolsonaro has come under fire for his plans to expand gold mining in the Amazon.

Bolsonaro, whose father was once a "garimpeiro," defends wildcat miners as hardscrabble frontiersmen.

Critics paint a different picture.

Mining destroyed a record 125 square kilometers (nearly 50 square miles) of the Brazilian Amazon last year—more than twice the size of Manhattan.

Much of the destruction was on protected indigenous reservations.

The use of mercury to separate gold dust from soil has also left toxic pollution in rivers.

Prosecutors say illegal gold miners have links to organized crime, and there have been deadly clashes between armed miners and indigenous groups opposed to them.

Artisanal mining is legal in Brazil, provided miners have environmental licenses and work on authorized land.

But many don't.

The government estimates there are 4,000 illegal miners operating on indigenous territory in the Amazon. Activists say the figure is much higher.

"What (the government) should be doing is proposing public policies and stimulating the development of artisanal and small-scale mining, fostering sustainable development for the region and the nation."

"Instead... the Bolsonaro administration looks set to defend the sector's 'historical values,' which is to say, environmental destruction," she said in a statement.

Bolsonaro, who has pushed to expand agribusiness and mining in the Amazon, has faced international
outcry over the destruction of the world's biggest rainforest.

Deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon has surged since the far-right leader took office in 2019, to a 15-year high of 13,235 square kilometers from August 2020 to July 2021.

© 2022 AFP

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.