

Survival International Press Release

17 November 2006

Colombia: New Disease Hit Nomads as Government Stands By

The nomadic Nukak-Maku, one of the last hunter-gatherer tribes in the world, has been hit by tuberculosis and chicken pox, putting their survival at serious risk.

The Nukak are camped on the edge of a town and are pleading with the government to be allowed to return to their homes in the rainforest, which they fled after becoming caught in the crossfire of Colombia's drugs war.

The tuberculosis and chicken pox follow a flu epidemic which affected almost a quarter of the tribe, the death of a nine year old boy, and the suicide of Nukak leader, Mao-be. Mao-be is believed to have been in despair at the failure of the government to arrange for his people to return home.

Since first being contacted by outsiders in 1988, when they numbered 1200, the Nukak have, like all isolated tribes, been very vulnerable to disease. Today just 500 survive; the rest have died from diseases such as malaria and flu.

Survival's Director, Stephen Corry, said today, "Although the government is providing food and some medical assistance to the Nukak refugees, it must realise that no amount of these things distributed to them on the outskirts of a town is going to ensure their survival. For that to happen, the Nukak must be able to return to their own homes, safely and with access to the necessary medical care."

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