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Colombia: Epidemic Hits Nomadic Amazon Tribe

The nomadic Nukak tribe, who fled their jungle homes after being caught up in Colombia's civil war, have been hit by a flu epidemic.

Almost a quarter of the tribe have fallen ill, and at least three have been taken to hospital in the nearest town.

Experts fear that further epidemics are likely unless the Nukak can be returned to their own territory. Flu and malaria have already killed half the tribe since they were first contacted in 1988; just 500 Nukak survive.

The crisis comes after the Nukak refugees were moved from their encampment on the edge of a town to a new home in the jungle.

Their new camp is just 2% of the size of their own territory and they continue to live in fear of armed conflict between the Colombian army, paramilitaries, and guerrillas. Health experts had warned that settling 200 Nukak in one place was likely to lead to outbreaks of disease, since traditionally the Nukak live in small, nomadic groups.

The Nukak's wild food is in short supply at their new camp; the forest there does not contain any of the trees necessary to make the blowpipes and poison that they need to hunt meat, and there are few fish in the rivers. Their own territory contains abundant natural resources.

Survival's Director, Stephen Corry, said today, 'It is absolutely essential that the Colombian government finds a way to let the Nukak return to their own land, otherwise they will not survive in the long term.'

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