



The case of illegal gold pillage in French Guiana tried before the Rights of Nature Tribunal

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France's failure to act in regards to the health and ecological scandal of illegal gold mining in French Guiana will be heard on Saturday 27 February 2021. This is one of the 5 mock trials of the European Tribunal of Nature's Rights in defense of aquatic ecosystems. Associations Wild Legal, ONAG, the Association of Women Victims of Mercury, Maiouri Nature Guyane, the Guides of French Guiana company and the collective Or de question have joined forces to draw attention to the dramatic situation that is hitting French Guiana, its ecosystems and its population.

The five mock trials of the European Tribunal of Nature Rights for the defense of aquatic ecosystems organised by the Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature ([GARN](#)) are scheduled every last Saturday of the month between January and May 2021. Their purpose is to raise public awareness of water and climate change issues. They also aim to question public decision-makers on the lack of rights of aquatic ecosystems in our current legal system.

The next hearing of the Tribunal will be held on **Saturday 27 February 2021**. It will focus on the consequences of illegal gold pillages in the French Amazon. For more than 30 years, French Guiana has been a region severely hit by illegal gold mining. This activity is devastating the country because of its major impact on the environment.

Mercury pollution of waterways due to these activities leads to a collapse of biodiversity and threatens the local population's health, especially the local Native Americans, the Wayana people, located upstream of the Maroni river.

Bursting the ground open with the help of powerful engines, illegal gold miners are responsible for the destruction of 1330km of waterways. The mercury used to treat the gold is thrown away into nature and then adds up to the mercury naturally present in the ground.

This metal can be found all along the food chain: stocked by plants and ingested by fishes, it contaminates those living alongside the river. Moreover, the muddy waters rejected by the gold mining activity are making the rivers turbid. Water is unhealthy and prevents fish' reproduction thereby damaging the ecosystem's health.

Despite the ban on mercury in French Guiana since 2006, and the protection afforded to the French Guiana National Park, the situation continues to deteriorate. 143 illegal sites were counted in the heart of the Amazonian Park in March 2020. Since the start of **the health crisis, the number of illegal sites has increased further**. The gold looters, attracted by the high price of gold in this period of pandemic and economic crisis, are applying **ever greater pressure** on the territory and making living conditions very difficult for the local population.

Due to their faulty failure to protect the Amazonian ecosystems of Upper Maroni and its human and non-human inhabitants, the French state and the French Guiana region are thus accused before this mock court of not having effectively protected the rights of nature and indigenous peoples.

Witnesses and experts will also take the stand. The interveners in the trial are: **Marine Calmet**, president of the Wild Legal association, **Alexis Tiouka**, an expert in indigenous peoples' law and **Linia Opoya**, president of the association of women victims of mercury and inhabitant of Taluen, an Amerindian village in Haut Maroni.

The session will be chaired by judges who are internationally recognised for their knowledge of environmental justice: **Cormac Cullinan**, lawyer and writer (Wild Law: A Manifesto for Earth Justice), **Lisa Mead**, lawyer and founder of the Earth Law Alliance, **Valérie Cabanes**, international lawyer and member of Stop Ecocide, **Tom BK Goldtooth**, Director of the Indigenous Environmental Network, activist for the rights of indigenous peoples and the rights of nature.

The parties to the lawsuit will base their arguments on French law but also on the doctrine of the rights of Nature, in order to inspire a positive evolution of our current law, the features of which no longer respond to the challenges of our century.

The jury's conclusions will be sent to the competent authorities, ministries and public institutions to ensure the claims for the rights of nature and indigenous peoples are heard. These documents will also be made available to local organisations in order to provide them with technical support in their potential litigation appeals.

The hearing will take place on 27 February 2021 online at 5 p.m. and will be accessible to all. The video of the session will be broadcast afterwards.

[See the Facebook event.](#)

Watch the event online:

 bit.ly/FrenchGuianaEN

 bit.ly/FrenchGuianaFR

Register at rightsofnaturetribunal.eventbrite.com.

For more information on the case of illegal gold pillage in French Guiana, visit the website of [the Tribunal des droits de la Nature](#) and the website of [the association Wild Legal](#).