

Right to Food Mandate - Special Procedures Branch  
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights  
Palais Wilson - 52 rue des Pâquis CH-1201  
Geneva, Switzerland

**Re: Information on Brazil, submitted by the Volta Grande do Xingu Alliance, to inform the Human Rights Council Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, focusing on the right to food and securing sustainable small-scale fisheries, detailing the impacts of industrial mining on Fisheries**

1. This document highlights the significant impacts of mining activities on fishing practices, cultural rights, and the right to food in the Amazon region. It also highlights the urgent need for states to implement policies based on socially just and ecologically responsible approaches that protect both the environment and the rights of Indigenous Peoples and traditional communities. The Amazon rainforest, known for its vast biodiversity and river systems that are essential for global climate stability, has been deeply affected by the expansion of the mining sector.
2. Mining, characterized by habitat destruction, water pollution, and altered hydrological regimes, significantly disrupts river ecosystems, putting the livelihoods and cultural heritage of Indigenous and traditional communities at risk. The complex interplay between mining, fishing, and human rights violations underscores the urgent need for approaches that protect the Amazon ecosystem's delicate balance while respecting its inhabitants' rights. In this context, we encompass all facets of mineral extraction, including of those so-called 'critical minerals for the energy transition.' This highlights the imperative to intensify our concerns about both current and future impacts.

*Mining-Related Impacts on Fisheries and Ecosystems:*

3. **Water Pollution:** The use of toxic substances and heavy metals, such as [mercury and cyanide](#), in mining processes [contaminates river systems](#), making fish [inedible](#) and putting the [health](#) of local communities at risk. In addition to contamination from the toxins used in the extraction process, [mining waste can cause oxygen depletion and pH changes](#), leading to acid mine drainage, which leaches heavy metals into water sources. Acid mine drainage is almost impossible to remedy and can last for hundreds of years. Heavy metals accumulate at the bottom of rivers, and many are bioaccumulators and can move up the food chain. These factors directly impact the loss of biodiversity in aquatic ecosystems.
4. **Habitat Destruction:** In Brazil, for instance, the impact of industrial mining extends far beyond the designated areas, [causing deforestation up to 12 times the allocated space](#) and

resulting in a destruction radius spanning up to 70 kilometers. The [mining industry's deforestation](#) of extensive forested areas leads to river soil erosion and sedimentation, reducing fish breeding habitats and decreasing fish and chelonian populations.

5. **Altered Hydrological Regimes:** Alteration of hydrological regimes: Industrial mining operations have significant impacts on fisheries, as they alter hydrological regimes by diverting and manipulating river courses. These activities disrupt the natural hydrological balance, affecting fish migration and reproduction patterns. In addition, an alarming finding from the NGO FASE's study highlights that [in Brazil the mining sector uses almost 600 billion liters of water a year without indicating its origin](#), showing a lack of control over the use of the country's river basins.

#### *Territorial Conflicts:*

6. Mining activities often result in territorial conflicts between companies in the sector and local communities, resulting in displacement, food insecurity and the erosion of the social fabric and cultural practices. This happens when communities are separated from their ancestral territories and fishing grounds, and become victims of the private appropriation of natural resources by these same companies. The dispute over access to common goods, such as water and minerals, is one of the main drivers of these conflicts that impact on fishing and the right to food of the populations that depend on this activity.

#### *Human Rights Violations:*

7. **Cultural Rights:** Cultural rights: The interruption of fishing practices by mining infringes on the cultural rights of Indigenous Peoples and traditional communities, preventing new generations from having access to ancestral knowledge and traditions and erasing centuries-old cultural heritage. [One example is in the Brazilian Amazon, where Canadian company Belo Sun is threatening to open Brazil's largest open-pit gold mine.](#) The mining company is facing lawsuits for hiring armed security forces to threaten local populations with eviction and attempts to limit the communities' traditional livelihood activities, such as hunting and fishing.
8. **Right to Food:** Mining pollution and habitat destruction block access to fish, a primary source of nutrition, violating the right to access safe and culturally appropriate food. The case of the [Canadian mining company Equinox Gold, whose dam broke in the Brazilian Amazon in Maranhão](#), is striking in terms of the serious economic and social impacts on the food and livelihoods of peoples who continue to be condemned to live in territories with soils and rivers contaminated by toxic tailings from the mining industry.

#### *Alternative Approaches and Policy Recommendations:*

9. **Community involvement:** Ensure that all Indigenous Peoples or traditional communities directly or indirectly affected by mining activities are guaranteed their right to free, prior, and informed consent and consultation. This public participation must not be merely formal, but communities must be able to effectively influence decision-making processes.
10. **Environmental Regulations:** Enforce [robust environmental rules and laws](#) to hold mining companies accountable, prevent ecological damage, and mitigate impacts on fisheries. It is also necessary to ensure effective environmental monitoring, establishing clear sanction mechanisms, and access to justice in order to guarantee full reparation.
11. **Biodiversity Conservation:** Protect critical fish habitats and river flow regimes by incorporating these considerations into planning and licensing processes. Consider the rights of Nature - e.g., of rivers - when evaluating biodiversity conservation strategies.
12. **Protecting water, rivers, and watersheds:** Implementing strict regulations and due accountability for environmental crimes mining companies commit are fundamental. Above all, promoting the restoration of degraded areas will significantly reduce the negative impact on fishing. A promising example is the Hidrograma Piracema in the Volta Grande do Xingu, in the Brazilian Amazon. This collaborative initiative proposes an innovative approach to managing the Xingu River's water flow. Through Independent Territorial Environmental Monitoring, Hidrograma Piracema seeks to balance human demands with the ecosystem requirements essential for the harmonious maintenance of aquatic life. It reinforces the importance of participatory governance and the need to consider holistic environmental criteria in managing water resources, providing valuable guidelines to protect aquatic ecosystems in regions affected by mining.
13. **Livelihood diversification:** Respect communities' right to develop non-extractive activities aimed at economic alternatives to mining, including agroecological agriculture, non-timber forest products, and community-driven solutions to increase food security and cultural resilience.
14. Protecting the sensitive balance of the Amazon rainforest, preserving cultural heritage, and defending fundamental rights require efforts from governments, regulatory agencies, international organizations, and civil society. Urgent action is needed to strengthen and enable approaches prioritizing social and ecological responsibility, agroecological practices, community-driven and community-developed solutions, and cultural preservation, ensuring a just energy transition and securing a future for the Amazon, its fisheries, and its people.