

Survival International Press Release

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## **Colombia: Suicide of Amazon Nomad Leader**

A leader of the nomadic Nukak tribe has committed suicide after drinking a poison usually used by his people to kill fish.

The Nukak man, Mao-be, killed himself after trying to help his people return to the rainforest. The Nukak were forced to flee their homes after becoming caught up in Colombia's drugs war involving the army, paramilitaries and guerrillas. Now living on the outskirts of a town, they are pleading to return.

'He felt desperate because he couldn't find the resources for the Nukak to return to their land, which they love and to which they want to return,' said a statement from Colombia's national indigenous organization, ONIC. The suicide comes after the recent death of a nine year old boy and a flu epidemic in which almost a quarter of the tribe were taken ill. Since first contact with outside society in 1988 over half the tribe have died, and many continue to suffer from malnutrition, diarrhoea, flu and respiratory infections.

Survival's Director, Stephen Corry, said today, 'Mao-be's death serves as a tragic illustration of the Nukak's experience of contact with Western society. The Colombian government must now act to make sure the Nukak are allowed to return safely to their homes, which is what Mao-be died fighting for. If they don't, one of Colombia's last nomadic tribes will become extinct.'

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