

Massive Fake News Campaign Targets Brazil's Amazon Fires



Seemingly everybody has heard about the fires burning in the Amazon, creating smoke and haze events in cities as far away as Sao Paulo. The question is, who is spreading the alarm and is it real or fake?

The hysteria over Brazil's "lungs of the earth" has even become a central contention at the G7 meeting in Europe, with global leaders calling for intervention to save the Amazon jungle.

The problem is that most pictures being circulated on social media are NOT of this year's fires at all! Photos are being dragged out from fires dating back to 1989 and presented as if they were taken in 2019.



The real facts: Official Nasa photo as of August 13, 2019.

This is fake news and blatant disinformation at its worst, but the world's news media is using it to fan the fires of outrage in an attempt to achieve a political outcome, namely, Sustainable Development.

In particular, the Amazon rain forest is seen as vital to countering global warming.

Meteorologist Eric Holthaus, who writes for the radical environmental journal Grist, Tweeted today,

*"Smoke from the fires currently burning in the Amazon rainforest is covering about half of Brazil. **We are in a climate emergency.**"*

Apparently fire and smoke is seen as proof of global warming.

However, considering that the rain forrest stretches across Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, Guyana, Suriname, and French Guiana, why is it that only Brazil is under attack by the Sustainable Development crowd?

First, remember that the first Earth Summit that produced Agenda 21 and Sustainable Development in the first place was held in Rio

DeJaneiro, Brazil in 1992. Thus, Brazil is akin to sacred ground to UN policy wonks.

Second, Brazil's newly-elected president Jair Bolsonaro is strongly opposed to globalization, left-wing policies and is pointedly anti-Communist. Bolsonaro has become a lightning rod for attack much in the same way and for the same reasons as U.S. President Donald Trump.

The bottom line is that while fires are real, the Chicken Little panic is fake.

Amazon fires: how celebrities are spreading disinformation (AFP)

Many high-profile figures seeking to denounce the fires in the Amazon — from Madonna and Cristiano Ronaldo to Leonardo DiCaprio and Emmanuel Macron — have unwittingly ended up misleading millions on social media, either sharing photographs of the region that are years old or images taken in other parts of the world.

Official figures show nearly 73,000 forest fires were recorded in Brazil in the first eight months of the year, the highest number for any year since 2013. Most were in the Amazon.

- Leaders -

"Our house is on fire. Literally. The Amazon, the lung of our planet which produces 20 percent of our oxygen is burning," France's President Emmanuel Macron said on Twitter, posting a photograph of a burning forest (1) accompanied by the hashtag #ActForTheAmazon.

"It is an international crisis. Members of the G7, let's talk in two days about this emergency," Macron said ahead of a planned summit this weekend in Biarritz.

But the photograph used by the French leader does not show this year's fires. A reverse image search showed that it was taken by the American

photojournalist Loren McIntyre, known for his work for National Geographic.

Although the image search tool does not reveal when exactly the photograph was taken, McIntyre died in 2003, meaning the image is at least 16 years old.

(1) <https://perma.cc/D93C-AYL7>

Chile's president, Sebastian Pinera, also ended up tweeting a misleading image to issue a warning about the fires, using a photograph (2) by Reuters journalist Nacho Doce from 2013.

(2) <https://perma.cc/6D8D-39L8>

- Actors -

Leonardo DiCaprio shared two pictures that proved to be inaccurate — the first (3) was the same one shared by Macron while the second (4) was shot in the Peruvian city of Puerto Maldonado in 2016.

Peru is not currently affected by the fires, though authorities are “on alert”.

(3) <https://perma.cc/Z24S-L6PM>

(4) <https://perma.cc/P2CG-ZHA9>

Actor and rapper Jaden Smith, son of superstar Will Smith, posted a dramatic image (5) on Instagram that shows a vast forest on fire as huge columns of smoke rise from it. But the photo, which has garnered more than 1.5 million likes, dates back to 1989.

(5) <https://perma.cc/CZD3-6PZZ>

Argentine actress and singer Martina Stoessel also shared an old photo (6) with a Twitter post saying, “How sad to see this...”. That picture was shot by Getty Images photographer Mario Toma in 2014.

(6) <https://perma.cc/3YLS-H8SG>

- Sports stars -

F1 driver Lewis Hamilton (7) and Brazil soccer captain Dani Alves (8) also posted one of the most widely shared misleading images — the picture taken by photographer McIntyre before 2003.

(7) <https://perma.cc/S5UF-GTTB>

(8) <https://perma.cc/F67M-TTZU>

Meanwhile tennis star Novak Djokovic (9) shared the 1989 photo posted by Smith.

(9) <https://perma.cc/SCS9-KPEW>

Portuguese soccer superstar Cristiano Ronaldo sounded the alarm on Instagram, alerting his 180 million followers that “the Amazon Rainforest produces more than 20% of the world’s oxygen and its been burning for the past 3 weeks.” But the photo (10) accompanying his message was taken on March 29, 2013 by Lauro Alves, from the Brazilian agency RBS, in the non-Amazonian state of Rio Grande do Sul.

(10) <https://perma.cc/5H4H-GKTB>

Barca striker Luis Suarez also posted an old photo (11) dating back to 2015 and shot by journalist Nacho Doce.

(11) <https://perma.cc/3TVF-4TSR>

- Singers -

Puerto Rican pop star Ricky Martin (13) and Cuban-American singer Camila Cabello (14) also shared the McIntyre photo tweeted by Macron, DiCaprio and Alves.

(13) <https://perma.cc/2L2Y-58KL>

(14) <https://perma.cc/LVH8-CCW2>

US superstar Madonna posted the same 1989 image (15) shared by Smith and Djokovic, writing on Instagram: “President Bolsonaro please

change your policies and help not only your country but the entire planet. No economic development is more important than protecting this land.”

“We need to WAKE -UP!!” she wrote.

(15) <https://perma.cc/SNZ2-3KV4>

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