

PARTS OF BRAZIL'S AMAZON RAINFOREST ARE BEING ILLEGALLY SOLD ON FACEBOOK, THE BBC HAS DISCOVERED

- The protected areas include national forests and land reserved for indigenous peoples.
- Some of the plots listed via Facebook's classified ads service are as large as 1,000 football pitches.
- Facebook said it was "ready to work with local authorities", but indicated it would not take independent action of its own to halt the trade.
- "Our commerce policies require buyers and sellers to comply with laws and regulations," the Californian tech firm added.

THE AMAZON HAS BEEN DESCRIBED AS BEING THE LUNGS OF THE EARTH - AND
IT IS BEING DESTROYED



NO CERTIFICATES

- The leader of one of the indigenous communities affected has urged the tech firm to do more.
- And campaigners have claimed the country's government is unwilling to halt the sales.
- "The land invaders feel very empowered to the point that they are not ashamed of going on Facebook to make illegal land deals," said Ivaneide Bandeira, head of environmental NGO Kanindé.
- Anyone can find the illegally invaded plots by typing the Portuguese equivalents for search terms like "forest", "native jungle" and "timber" into Facebook Marketplace's search tool, and picking one of the Amazonian states as the location.
- Some of the listings feature satellite images and GPS co-ordinates.

CATTLE ARE OFTEN PUT TO GRAZE ON LAND THAT IS MEANT TO BE PROTECTED



NO CERTIFICATES

- Many of the sellers openly admit they do not have a land title, the only document which proves ownership of land under Brazilian law.
- The illegal activity is being fuelled by Brazil's cattle ranching industry.

'NO RISK'

- Deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon is at a 10-year high, and Facebook's Marketplace has become a go-to site for sellers like Fabricio Guimarães, who was filmed by a hidden camera.
- "There's no risk of an inspection by state agents here," he said as he walked through a patch of rainforest he had burnt to the ground.
- With the land illegally cleared and ready for farming, he had tripled his initial asking price to \$35,000 (£25,000).
- Fabricio is not a farmer. He has steady middle-class job in a city, and views the rainforest as being an investment opportunity.
- The BBC later contacted Fabricio for his response to its investigation but he declined to comment.

GOING UNDERCOVER

- Many of the ads came from Rondônia, the most deforested state in Brazil's rainforest region.
- The BBC arranged meetings between four sellers from the state and an undercover operative posing as a lawyer claiming to represent wealthy investors.
- One man, called Alvim Souza Alves, was trying to sell a plot inside the Uru Eu Wau Wau indigenous reserve for about £16,400 in local currency.
- It is the home to a community of more than 200 Uru Eu Wau Wau people. And at least five further groups that have had no contact with the outside world also live there, according to the Brazilian government.
- But at the meeting, Mr Alves claimed: "There are no Indians [sic] there. From where my land is, they are 50km [31 miles] away. I am not going to tell you that at one time or another they are not walking around."

THE URU EU WAU WAU PEOPLE ARE TRYING TO PROTECT THEIR LAND FROM INVADERS



- The BBC showed the Facebook ad to community leader Bitaté Uru Eu Wau Wau.
- He said the lot was in an area used by his community to hunt, fish and collect fruits.
- "This is a lack of respect," he said.
- "I don't know these people. I think their objective is to deforest the indigenous land, to deforest what is standing. To deforest our lives, you could say."
- He said the authorities should intervene, and also urged Facebook - "the most accessed social media platform" - to take action of its own.

CHANGED STATUS

- Another factor driving the illegal land market is the expectation of amnesty.
- Mr Alves revealed he was working with others to lobby politicians to help them legally own stolen land.
- "I'll tell you the truth: if this is not solved with [President] Bolsonaro there, it won't be solved anymore," he said of the current government.
- A common strategy is to deforest the land and then plead with politicians to abolish its protected status, on the basis it no longer serves its original purpose.
- The land grabbers can then officially buy the plots from the government, thereby legalising their claims.

THE AMAZON RAINFOREST IS HOME TO ONE IN 10 KNOWN SPECIES ON EARTH



- The BBC also approached Brazil's Minister of the Environment, Ricardo Salles.
- He said: "President Jair Bolsonaro's government has always made it clear that his is a zero-tolerance government for any crime, including environmental ones."
- The government has cut the inspections budget for Ibama, the federal agency that in charge of regulating deforestation, by 40%.
- But Mr Salles said the coronavirus pandemic had hampered law enforcement in the Amazon, and that state governments also bore responsibility for the deforestation.
- "This year the government has created operation Verde Brasil 2, which seeks to control illegal deforestation, illegal fires, and to join efforts between the federal government and the states," he added.

"NEVER, IN ANY OTHER
MOMENT IN HISTORY, HAS IT
BEEN SO HARD TO KEEP THE
FOREST STANDING."

RAPHAEL BEVILAQUIA, A FEDERAL PROSECUTOR BASED IN RONDÔNIA,