

Action Alert: Police raid reclaimed Indigenous lands in Brazil

by Alert Against the Green Desert Movement
Wednesday, 25 January 2006

Brazil - On 20 January 2005, Brazil returned to the period of Military Dictatorship (1964-1985) when human rights were systematically violated and the institutions lacked the capacity to protect and defend citizens against the aggression of an authoritarian State. Three delegates and 120 Federal Policemen from the Command for Tactical Operations carried out a war operation to take the Tupinikim and Guarani indigenous peoples in Espirito Santo state out of the 11,009 hectares of lands they had taken back peacefully in May 2005. Aracruz Celulose controlled these lands for almost 40 years. The police action was based on a decision on 7 December 2005 regarding this case by Federal Judge Rog rio Moreira Alves from Linhares, in favour of the Aracruz company.

We are bewildered and shocked, and feel a deep indignation looking at the police action, since we live in what is considered to be a democratic country, a signatory of the International Treaty on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and led by an ex-worker and ex-persecuted person by the Military Dictatorship: Lu z In cio Lula da Silva.

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It is important to make clear that:

1.       Since the Tupinikim and Guarani demarcated the 11,009 hectares that belongs to them, according to studies realized by the FUNAI (The Federal Governmental Indigenous Agency), and recognized in 1998 by the ex-Minister of Justice Iris Rezende, Aracruz Celulose repeatedly affirmed that they were against the use of violence against the Indians. However, Aracruz assumed a leading role in the police action on 20 January that resulted in at least 13 wounded Indians, of whom two had to be treated in hospital in Aracruz town; one of them, Jo o Mateus - Chief of Comboios - stayed alone for several hours, wounded and losing a lot of blood. The Indians were hit by rubber bullets, fired by federal policemen who also were armed with tear gas and sub-machine guns. For more than one hour, the police "hunted" Indians by helicopter at the Olho de  gua village, shooting at them and persecuting them. Two indigenous leaders were arrested violently; the police broke the arm of one of them, Paulo de Oliveira. It is important to mention that the machines used for the destruction of the indigenous houses in C rrego do Ouro and Olho de  gua were from the Aracruz company. In Olho de  gua, policemen even set fire to everything. In spite of their barbarism, the Federal Police did not succeed in removing the Indians from Olho de  gua, which the Indians are already rebuilding.

2.       The Public Prosecution Service in the Esp rito Santo state was not involved, although this was necessary according to the judge's decision. The National FUNAI in Bras lia was informed, but the Regional Coordinator of the FUNAI, Waldemar Krenak, and the two local FUNAI heads (Ronaldo Batista and Maria F tima de Oliveira) stated that they were not even told about the police action. The attorney Andr  Pimentel, responsible for indigenous issues, described the action as "completely illegal". The two FUNAI-members F tima and Ronaldo affirmed that they were pressured by federal police agents and taken to the the Guest House of Aracruz Celulose S/A, where the headquarters of the police operation was. It was there that they learned about the judge's decision and the police suggested they could accompany the policemen in their operation. The two arrested Indians were also taken to the Guest House of the Aracruz company, where they were kept handcuffed for several hours. The fact that the headquarters of the operation was the Guest House of Aracruz Celulose S/A was proven by Federal Parliamentarian Iriny Lopes, also President of the Federal Congress Human Rights Commission, and the  State Parliamentarian Carlos Casteglione who were there on the 20th at night. 

3.       The Brazilian Federal Police is politically and governmentally subordinate to the Minister of Justice, M rcio Thomaz Bastos, who is therefore responsible for this action. However, what really strikes us is that the Ministry of Justice had reached an understanding with the indigenous communities over the procedure to come to a rapid official recognition of the self-demarcated indigenous lands, involving other actors such as the federal attorney, FUNAI, Human Rights Commission of the National Congress, state parliamentarians and supporting organizations, agreeing also to prevent any eviction of the Indians from the occupied area.

4. We notice that this police action has been carefully planned in a month in which many Brazilian people are on holiday, diminishing significantly the rhythm of functioning of governmental and non-governmental institutions. Moreover, those who planned the action chose a Friday, for sure to minimize even more the repercussion in the national and international public opinion, and reduce the possibilities of suspending the action by political or judicial means. When the judge's decision was suspended, also on 20 January, by the Federal Regional Court of the 2nd Region in Rio de Janeiro, the Indians had already been expelled from the village of C rrego de Ouro.

We want to express here our solidarity with the Tupinikim and Guarani communities, with their Chiefs and leaders, and praise their courage and determination. We hope that this violent action will strengthen even more the union of these peoples and their allies. For sure, the indigenous struggle will be victorious because it is based on an undeniable right and it is being waged in a peaceful way, led by Chiefs and leaders who are concerned about the future of their people. And definitely, Aracruz will not be victorious in this struggle, once the company has chosen the way of lies and violence, all in order to guarantee the financial profits of its shareholders.

We appeal to all that you express your opinion about this action against the Tupinikim and Guarani, and about the need of the demarcation of their lands. At this very moment, the collaboration of all who support the indigenous struggle is important!

ALERT AGAINST THE GREEN DESERT NETWORK

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We have the following suggestion for a message to send to the Brazilian authorities:

Ao Exmo. Sr. Presidente da Rep blica - Lu z In cio Lula da Silva - pr@planalto.gov.br

Exmo. Sr. Ministro da Justi a - M rcio Thomaz Bastos - gabinetemj@mj.gov.br

Exmo. Sr. Presidente da Funai - M rcio Pereira Gomes - mercio.gomes@funai.gov.br

With a copy to: MPF-ES - pres@pres.mpf.gov.br e FASE-ES - fasees@terra.com.br

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23 January 2006

Hereby we would like to show our indignation about the violation of human rights, which happened on 20th January in indigenous lands in the North of Esp rito Santo. In the action of expelling the Tupinikim and Guarani indigenous peoples from their lands, the most violent resources were utilized, resulting in at least 13 wounded Indians, 2 Indians arrested and processed and 2 indigenous villages completely destroyed by the use of machines and employees of Aracruz Celulose.

We demand that this fact will be immediately investigated and that the authors of the action be held criminally responsible.

We would like to alert the authorities that the only way of solving this conflict is the demarcation of the 11.009 hectares in question by the federal government of Brazil.

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Yours Sincerely,

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