

Brazilian Army Recruits Yanomami Indians

Several Yanomami Indians are "serving" in the Brazilian Army at the Maturaca post, located in the state of Amazonas. The one-year enlistment of the Yanomami is part of a strategy by the Brazilian Armed Forces to "integrate" indigenous populations into the "national community."

The military commanders' strategy is based on the ideas of "national sovereignty" and "national security." They fear that Indian groups will form their own nation inside the Brazilian territory. In July, Roraima governor and former brigadier general Ottomar de Souza Pinto, compared the Yanomami situation to the Kurds in Iraq. The relationship between the Yanomami and the military in the Maturaca region is similar to that of the Yanomami and the gold-miners.

The army wants to increase its presence in Maturaca. That is why soldiers are building an illegal road between the city of São Gabriel da Cachoeira and the post in Maturaca. Five kilometers of the road have already been completed. The road is illegal because it cuts through the Pico da Neblina National Park and the military has not even presented an Environmental Impact Report to the government environmental agency.



Tikuna Massacre Update

(Brazil) March 28th marked three years since the Tikuna massacre, when 14 Tikuna men, women and children were shot to death at the command of logger, Oscar Castello Branco, near the city of Benjamin Constant in the state of Amazonas, in the Brazilian Amazon.

This was the most serious documented massacre of Brazilian Indians in the last twenty years. The 15,000 Tikuna on the upper Solimões River form the largest Indian nationality in Brazil. In recent years, they have suffered increasing incursions by loggers, commercial fisheries, and local elites on their lands. At the same time, their organizing in defense of their traditional lands has grown stronger.

Since 1988, legal investigation of the crime has slowly proceeded in Benjamin Constant. At the end of last year, the judge responsible for the case indicted all of the accused, who are now to stand trial before a local jury, chosen from the residents of the city.

The general opinion in the city, however, leads us to believe that this will not be an impartial trial. Most of the local people have shown support for the logger, who is well-known in the region. In general, there is hostility towards the Indians and their presence in the area.

Consequently, the Tikuna and their support organizations are requesting that the judge and the public prosecutor ask the Tribunal of Justice of the state of Amazonas for a change of venue. It is hoped that the trial will be held in the state capital of Manaus.

The local judge and prosecutor - the only authorities who can legally make the request - are reluctant to do so. If this situation continues, the likely outcome is impunity for the defendants, who would be tried in Benjamin Constant, and very likely, be absolved.

We request that concerned individuals and organizations send letters or telegrams to the authorities noted below, requesting that the Tribunal reexamine the Tikuna massacre case, keeping in mind the hostile attitudes towards Indian people in the city of Benjamin Constant and that a change of venue be granted.

Please send these letters to:

Exmo. Sr. Dr. Luis Henrique Braz
Juiz de Direito da Comarca de Benjamin Constant
Forum de Benjamin Constant, 69630 Benjamin Constant, AM, BRAZIL

Exmo. Sr. Dr. Sergio Medeiros
Promotor de Justica da Comarca de Benjamin Constant
Forum de Benjamin Constant, 69630 Benjamin Constant, AM, BRAZIL

Exmo. Sr. Dr. Gaspar Catunda de Sousa
Desembargador Presidente do Tribunal de Justica do Amazonas
Rua 10 de julho, no. 833 Centro, 69007 Manaus, AM, BRAZIL

Send copies of all correspondence to:
Ambassador Marcilio Marques Moreira, Brazilian Embassy
3006 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20008, USA
Fax: 202-745-2728