



AN URGENT PLEA FROM THE SURUÍ

(Brazil) The Suruí Indian people of Rondônia, represented by the Metareilá Organization of the Suruí Indigenous People, sent SAIIC the following communiqué to publicize their current situation.

We are... located at kilometer 50 in the municipality of Cacoal and live on our traditional lands in six villages. Our population is estimated to be 511 and we have been in contact with the national society for over 20 years and have adapted many of the customs of this society.

The majority of us wear western clothes, know the value of money, and eat foods that are different from our traditional diet. In 1978, the Suruí lands were invaded by colonists. After many

conflicts and many casualties among both colonists and Indians, we succeeded in expelling the colonists from our reserves without governmental support.

Currently, we are concerned about security. The Suruí of Rondônia are suffering many threats and even murders. Recently a Suruí Indian was killed by gunmen hired by ranchers who had invaded the indigenous reserve of the Zoró Indians (The Suruí allied themselves with the Zoró Indians in order to expel the colonizing ranchers).

The Suruí of Rondônia have suffered much persecution at the hands of the ranchers, politicians and police of the Municipality of Cacoal. The government has not taken a single measure regarding these persecutions. Meanwhile, the Suruí live with danger and anxiety, fearing more massacres as long as there is no justice.



Suicides Plague the Guarani-Kaiowa

(Brazil) Suicide, almost unheard of among Indians in the past, is a disturbing new phenomenon among the Guarani-Kaiowa people in Brazil's western state of Mato Grosso do Sul. Early this year Maura Ramirez, a 15 year-old, hung herself from a tree on the reservation. Her sister, Helena, one year older, had done the same a few months earlier. Since last year, 25 Guarani-Kaiowa have committed suicide and 37 others have attempted it according to statistics from FUNAI (the government's National Indian Institute). Anthropologists blame this on the loss of land and cultural identity in the face of an invasion by ranchers and farmers. More than half of the traditional lands claimed by the Guarani-Kaiowas have been settled by outsiders. "What we are seeing is a culture in agony, pleading for help," said anthropologist Maria Aparecida de Costa Pereira, who recently completed a study of the tribe.

Violence and disease have decimated Indian people since Pedro Alvares Cabral and the Portuguese arrived in Brazil in the 16th century. A native population estimated at 5 million in 1500 has been reduced to 220,000 today. The 7200 Guarani-Kaiowa who live on an 8,000 acre reservation have been experiencing increasing pressures in the past few years. Currently the land they have is not enough to sustain their subsistence farming. Judges are hostile to indigenous claims, and readily accept white landowners' property deeds, which are often obtained fraudulently. Ambrosio, a Guarani-Kaiowa leader asks: "What documents do they want from us beyond our flesh and blood? We were born here, as were our mothers,

fathers and grandparents, who are buried on this land."

The current situation makes the young men leave in search of work as migrant farmers, to cut sugar cane for one of the alcohol distilleries that dot the region, or to migrate to the cities. Since eligible mates are scarce many Guarani-Kaiowa young women seek work in Dourados, a city of 80,000 near the reservation. Many of them work as maids or prostitutes, only to be rejected after returning to their people. Many of those who have committed suicide did so shortly after returning to the reservation from outside work - or while drunk.

Some Guarani-Kaiowa are abandoning traditional faiths and joining Pentecostal sects in the area. Eduardo Leao, an official with the Roman Catholic-linked Indigenous Missionary Council (CIMI), claims that the Guarani-Kaiowa believe that they will go to their father's house after they die, where they will be able to live in the traditional manner. "So suicide is not a negation of life but a way of prolonging it."

FUNAI officials say they cannot legally set aside more land for the Guarani-Kaiowa, but Leao criticizes the government for ignoring the constitutional guarantees of protection for indigenous lands and cultures. "Defending the tribe doesn't require anything extraordinary, but simply obeying the law. If the federal government doesn't do something soon, the Guarani-Kaiowa are going to disappear."

Source: San Francisco Examiner, by Ken Silvertstein