

Italian Oil Company Occupies Area Belonging to Xavante Indians

Brazil, July 17, 1992. The recovery of part of the territory traditionally occupied by Xavante Indians depends on a concrete action of an Italian corporation, *Agip Petroli*, the holding company of the Italian state-owned *Enter Nazionali Idrocarbure (ENI)*. The area in question, which is located in the state of Mato Grosso, is presently known as Suia-Missu farm and was bought by ENI in 1981. Although the chairman of the company, Gabriele Cagliari, announced on June 10 at the Earth Summit that the area would be re-turned to the Xavante Indians, he has not made good on his promise so far. Cagliari had said that the area would be returned to the Indians on the 8th of July 1992.

According to FUNAI (National Indian Foundation), ENI's representatives in Brazil oppose the idea of returning the area to the Xavante Indians, defying the decision made by the board of the company in Italy. These representatives have been demanding a statement from FUNAI on the rights of the Xavante Indians over the area.

The delay to give the area back to the Indians is making it even more difficult for them to recover their territory. Two thousand families of squatters invaded the Suia-Missu farm on June 15, a few days after the announcement made by ENI's chairman. The squatters were encouraged to invade the area by mayors, politicians and farmers of the region, who oppose the idea of returning it to the Xavante Indians. They even prepared a map to show to the families the places they should invade and they are threatening to react with violence if the Indians do return. There have been accusations that they are occupying parts of the farm. These politicians claim that they rely on the support of the governor of the state of Mato Grosso, Julio Campos, and perhaps this is true, considering that he has not taken any measure to prevent the invasion. *Agip Petroli*, on its turn, hasn't voiced a word about the invasion of the farm, which is regarded as an area belonging to the company.

The Suia-Missu farm occupies most of the 200 thousand hectares of the Maraiwatsede Indian Area.

FUNAI initiated the demarcation of the area, but its immediate continuity depends on *Agip's* consent to the return of the Xavante Indians.

Agip Petroli bought the Suia-Missu farm in 1981. In the 50's, small squatter families began to invade Maraiwatsede. The area was bought by farmer Ariosto da Riva, who began to refer to the Indian territory as Suia-Missu farm. In 1962, the farmer associated with the Ometto entrepreneurial group in business undertakings. Ariosto da Riva and the Ometto family are of Italian origin.

Conflicts between the Xavante Indians and the invaders began to grow until in 1966 the federal administration transferred some of the Indians to the Sao Marcos Salesian Mission, 300 km away from the area. Not long after that, a measles outbreak hit the mission and over 100 Indians died, many of whom had come from Maraiwatsede. The Indians who had stayed in Suia-Missu were taken to another Xavante area. The Ometto group sold the farm to the *Liquigas do Brasil* company in 1972, which on its turn sold it to *Agip Petroli* in 1981.

The Xavante Indians never gave up the idea of returning to Maraiwatsede. Every year groups of Indians have been returning to the traditional territory to visit their old cemeteries and villages there. But only in 1984 did the Xavante Indians of Suia-Missu manage to get together once again in a single village, making it possible for them to claim their traditional territory in an organized way.

Source: Indianist Missionary Council (CIMI) newsletter



Representative Porter (US Congress) meets Chief Oren Lyon and other delegates. Photo SAIC