

Against the dismantling of environmental institutions and related violence in Brazil

NOTE OF THE COMMITTEE OF TRADITIONAL PEOPLES, THE ENVIRONMENT AND LARGE DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS OF THE BRAZILIAN ANTHROPOLOGY ASSOCIATION (ABA)

The *Committee of Traditional Peoples, the Environment and Large Development Projects of the Brazilian Anthropology Association (ABA)* publicly denounces the frightful dismantling of the country's environmental regulatory system by representatives of the Brazilian government.

The regulatory framework for the protection of the rights of traditional peoples, and Brazil's environmental and cultural diversity are under a revived malicious attack. The relaxation of environmental legislation has led to a serious dismantling of institutions and mechanisms of governance that resulted from decades of mobilization of Brazilian society. The offenses against the constitutional principles place us within a "crisis of the Democratic State of Law", in terms of the defense of the environment as a collective right of Brazilian citizens.

The government has announced changes that criminalize environmental protection and the traditional forms of occupation of territory, alleging that they impede the use of national resources. This ideology condemns Brazil to a role as a mere producer of agricultural and mineral commodities, a truly subordinated position in the international political-economic system.

The surrender to this neocolonial economic model reveals a strategy with an obscurantist bias of constant attacks and censorship of institutions that produce knowledge, including universities and research institutions such as the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), and the National Institute of Space Research (INPE).

To this is added the revival of authoritarian decision-making processes including sharp restrictions on participation by civil society that, through the extinction or weakening of councils and collegial bodies of federal public administration, threaten constitutional precepts. The National Environmental Council (CONAMA), for example, had its composition drastically reduced from 96 to 23 members, which will limit its functions related to the evaluation of the implementation and execution of the country's environmental policies and norms.

In a similar vein, government officials talk of the "elimination of activism" and label federal environmental agencies such as IBAMA and ICMBio as "factories for issuing fines" among other frightening accusations that create a climate of disrespect for current environmental laws. This has led to a reduction of environmental monitoring, rising deforestation, particularly in the Brazilian Amazon, increased invasions of lands of traditional peoples and an intensification of armed conflicts.

The serious changes are highlighted by efforts to construct a new General Law for Environmental Licensing through bills being deliberated in the Senate, under the pretext of "*debureaucratizing the licensing process*". A process is thus underway to weaken the regulatory framework, by substituting

instruments for state control with practices of corporate self-licensing, self-monitoring and voluntary environmental management.

The radical regulatory dismantling is indicated by licensing processes underway. Projects have been licensed even without a public hearing or the free and informed consent of the traditional communities affected, which are precepts of ILO Convention 169, of which Brazil is a signatory.

We are appalled by the daily reports of armed violence against indigenous peoples, such as the recent assassination of Emyra Waiãpi, a leader of the Waiãpi people, and invasions by gold miners, amid declarations of the government's intention to legalize mining and gold digging, as well as hydroelectric dams and electrical transmission lines on indigenous lands.

Significant efforts have been made to weaken regulations concerning industrial extractivism, to allow the expansion of mining activities. The situation is also alarming in regard to the National Plan for Dam Safety. Even after hundreds of deaths were recently caused by dam breaks in the municipalities of Mariana and Brumadinho, control and inspection measures for these structures remain limited and omit procedures to protect local communities.

Government declarations about the opening of environmental preserves and Indigenous Lands in the Amazon to economic exploitation, particularly mining, are of particular concern. They warn of explicit constitutional violations. Not by chance, recent data about the alarming increase in deforestation in the Amazon reported by INPE have been maliciously contested by the president of Brazil.

The illegal deforestation may become seriously aggravated by recent proposals to weaken the national Forest Code, which is being deliberated in the Senate, which would relax requirements for environmental reserves on private rural properties. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Agriculture has released a record number of herbicides and pesticides in a short space of time, many of which are prohibited in various countries, submitting the Brazilian population to increasing health risks.

All of this displays a violence that is wielded without disguise and dares to formulate an explicit policy of destruction of the forests and peoples that inhabit them. The discourses concerning the relaxation of the right to carry guns in Brazil has also been evoked in the name of defense of private property, once again ignoring constitutional principles that assure the defense of life above any other right.

Given this situation, the *Committee of Traditional Peoples, the Environment and Large Development Projects* expresses its repudiation of the initiatives mentioned and manifests its deep concern for the future of traditional peoples, and coming generations of all Brazilians, and for the integrity of constitutional precepts, whose flagrant deterioration reveals the depth of the current crisis in our democratic state of law.

Brasília, August 01, 2019.

Brazilian Anthropology Association (ABA) and its Committee of Traditional Peoples, the Environment and Large Development Projects