

Indigenous Peoples in Mato Grosso do Sul state, Brazil, Current Situation Overview (working document)¹

The history of the indigenous peoples in Brazil has been scorched by violent conflicts and a continuous state omission, leading to what we could call a silent genocide. Today, there about 900 (nine hundred) thousand indigenous in Brazil. Less than 20% the approximate estimate for their initial population during the colonization.

One of the main ways to address this situation would be demarcating the indigenous lands. However, the Brazilian state practically gave up promoting this right. Since 2011, when the current president's first term initiated, Brazil has seen the lowest number of indigenous lands being recognized or fully demarcated in all its recent democratic history: 2.6 and 2.8, respectively, contrasting with an average of 12.4 and 15.5 between 1995 and 2010.² Of the almost 600 (six hundred) indigenous lands claimed in 2014, the estimate is that only two of those were identified, one was demarcated and none has completed the full regularization procedure.

In Mato Grosso do Sul state, we have one of the most grievous human rights violations of indigenous peoples and the extremely low demarcation rate (only 1.6% of the state's territory has been fully recognized as indigenous lands³) is a key component in the situation.

The available data shows the increase in violence against the indigenous people in the last years and 2014 was a sad hallmark in this rise. In said year, there were at least 138 murders and 135 suicides of indigenous in Brazil.⁴ Between 2003 and 2014, 51% of all indigenous murders happened in Mato Grosso do Sul. There are also at least 21 cases of lack of health assistance leading to death and 785 children, between 0 and 5 years, are not under adequate living conditions, including access to food, water and health.

The violation of individual and collective rights are intrinsically linked to the economic model that has been chosen by the Brazilian state, fomenting the extractive industry that deeply impacts the indigenous peoples and the environment. Choosing a 'neo-developmental' approach that favors economic powers over traditional communities.

This development model encourages different kinds of violence, direct and indirect, against these communities and, at the same, prevents them from positively contributing to an alternative model on how to manage the territory – a model that preserves the environment and promotes a sustainable management of natural resources.

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² See <<http://pib.socioambiental.org/pt/c/0/1/2/demarcacoes-nos-ultimos-governos>>

³ See <[⁴ The numbers here shown were extracted from CIMI's Report 'Violence against Indigenous Peoples in Brazil – 2014'.](http://www.funai.gov.br/index.php/nossas-acoas/demarcacao-de-terras-indigenas?start=1#>></p></div><div data-bbox=)

By 2008, from the approximately 700.000km² of deforestation in the Amazon region, less than 2% occurred in indigenous lands and only 0.34% was due to indigenous activities.⁵ In the same region, on average, only 1.2% of the indigenous land would be targeted for deforestation.⁶

It is noteworthy that the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples recognizes specifically the situation of vulnerability that they are exposed to, mainly due to the prejudice they suffer and historically violence perpetrated against them. Its article 7 establishes their right to life, psychophysical integrity as well as their collective right to live in peace and security, however the picture we are seeing is a total disregard to these rights.

In regards specifically to Brazil, in its only specific report on the country, of 2009, the UN's Rapporteur on Indigenous Peoples already highlighted the widespread and systematic nature of the violence against indigenous peoples, giving special attention to the situation of the Guarani-Kaiowá peoples of Mato Grosso do Sul and how the apparent lack of accountability has helped in the maintaining said violence and conflict.⁷

Recently, on August 29, 2015, there was a conflict between land-owners and indigenous, planned by large farmers with apparent endorsement by federal parliamentarians and led by the president of the Rural Union of Antônio João's County, in Mato Grosso do Sul, Roseli Maria Ruiz, which resulted in the murder of Simião Vilhalva in Nãnde Rú Marangatú indigenous land. There are reports that other indigenous have also been wounded in the attack.

Farmers and gunmen remained in the area even after the arrival of State security forces, and a new attack was repeated the next day, apparently without the intervention of state forces. Despite the apparent initial mobilization of the state against this attack, it stands out that the eminence of the conflict had been directly communicated to the Justice Ministry, which did nothing at that time to prevent the worsening of the situation.

Unfortunately, the state response has been, with few exceptions, a reaction to tragedies that have already occurred. Limiting themselves to merely respond after the damage has already been done. The death of Simeão is, sadly, just another one of these episodes. While Brazil does not reverse its policy regarding indigenous peoples, ensuring regularization of their lands and providing real assistance and protection, cases like these will continue to be repeated.

⁵ See < ISA, Forest Trends, 'Desmatamento evitado (REDD) e povos indígenas', 2010, p. 87>

⁶ IPAM, 'Que papel as comunidades tradicionais e os povos indígenas vêm desempenhando na conservação das florestas tropicais e dos seus estoques de carbono?', < <http://www.ipam.org.br/saiba-mais/abc/mudancaspergunta/Que-medidas-foram-propostas-na-Convencao-do-Clima-para-lidar-com-a-questao-das-emissoes-causadas-pelo-desmatamento-/37/17>>

⁷ UN, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people, James Anaya, A/HRC/12/34/Add. 2, 26 ago. 2009, §32