
Brazil: concern over new President of FUNAI

The ex-congressman and vice-governor from Mato Grosso state Marcio Lacerda is the new president of the Brazilian Indian Foundation (FUNAI). He succeeds in this post Sullivan Silvestre, who died on February 1st in an air crash while he was on duty.

Mr Lacerda is one of the chief proponents of the system of waterways, including the Tocantins-Araguaia Hidrovia which would negatively affect the territory occupied by 10,000 indigenous people. During his first public declarations he defended gold mining, and biodiversity and timber exploitation in indigenous lands.

In a report dated 25/2/99 CIMI (Conselho Indigenista Missionario) expresses its concern and indignation over Mr Lacerda's approach, that is not focused on indigenous peoples' cultures and needs but on the natural resources of their territories. This is especially worrying, since several draft law bills contrary to the interests of indigenous peoples, guaranteed by the Brazilian Constitution, are waiting to be discussed in the National Congress and can now be promoted by FUNAI's new approach. Regarding mining activities menacing indigenous peoples' traditional lands it is to be mentioned that Jose Lacerda –brother of the new President of FUNAI- enthusiastically supported the invasion of the indigenous area of Sarare in 1996, that resulted in the genocide of the Kithauru indigenous group.

In his speech Lacerda condemned what he considers “extremely radical” proposals to defend indigenous peoples rights, focused on imposing bans that cannot be put into action. In his view, indigenous peoples' lands are to be transformed into productive areas.

Examples abound in Brazil and worldwide that contradict Mr Lacerda's point of view: the opening of indigenous territories to “development” brings no advantages to them nor to the local or global environment. If the Brazilian government were really committed to the respect for human rights and environmental conservation, then this person should be immediately removed from this post.

Sources: CIMI, 25/2/1999; Glenn Switkes, 23/2/1999.