
Brazil: say what they say, Monte Pascoal belongs to the Pataxó

Nearly fifty years after their traditional lands were taken over and much of their population decimated by military forces, the Pataxó indigenous people decided to recover them and took over Monte Pascoal National Park last August (see WRM Bulletin 28).

The Pataxó are now threatened by eviction, after a local judge ruled on 17 November that the National Park must be returned to the Brazilian Institute of Environment and Renewable Natural Resources (IBAMA). No date has yet been established for the eviction, but the Pataxó have vowed to resist it and disseminated a statement to the Brazilian people and authorities, declaring that Monte Pascoal is their sacred territory and that they "won't accept any decision, negotiation or proposal which implies their withdrawal from the area." They demand the return of the Working Group which was carrying out the studies for the demarcation of the Pataxó's territory and whose activities were suddenly stopped at the beginning of November. At the same time, they express their concern over a possible violent eviction and call on the government "to guarantee the personal safety of our families."

The judicial decision is yet another proof -nearing the celebration of the 500 years of the "discovery" of Brazil- that the Brazilian government continues disregarding the right of the indigenous peoples to return to their traditional territories. If the judicial decision is enforced, the government of President Fernando Henrique Cardoso will be ratifying the 1951 massacre of the Pataxó, which paved the way for the creation of the Monte Pascoal National Park. Many indigenous people were then murdered and the rest were forced to escape to save their lives. Since then, the survivors were forced to live in humiliation and misery.

History seems to repeat itself. As in the past, the Pataxó have all the rights, while the current government -as the Portuguese 500 years ago- has the power. As the Pataxó say, the collective memory of our people and the historical documents prove the justice of our struggle to recover Monte Pascoal." Whatever the "legal" system says to justify the unjustifiable, Monte Pascoal belongs to the Pataxó.

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