
Brazil: violence against Amazonian indigenous people

The destruction of the Amazon forests is strongly related to the violence that indigenous people and local communities have historically suffered to the hands of big landowners and with the compliance of local authorities. On February 22nd the Oxford Office of the WRM sent letters to several Brazilian authorities expressing concern for the assaults and murders recently happened against Macuxi indigenous people in Roraima State. The text of the letter is as follows:

"The World Rainforest Movement is deeply concerned by the news concerning ongoing assaults and murders of the indigenous Macuxi people in the Roraima State.

According to information received, on February 7 1999, Mr. Paulo José de Souza, an indigenous Macuxi, was twice shot at point blank range by Roberto Rodriguez, a squatter, and brother of both Francisco Rodríguez, a Uiramuta municipal councilor, and of Tiago Rodriguez, who are said to have supported the crime.

On February 10 1999, Mr. Egon Heck, a missionary, was stabbed by Jared Batista da Silva, a worker under Roberto Rodriguez. At the moment of the assault, he was on his way together with a group of indigenous people to the place where Mr. Paulo José de Souza had been injured. Suddenly the group was intercepted by eight members of the military police, six of whom were drunk, who threatened the indigenous people with their guns.

On 12 February 1999, Mr. Regelino Nascimento de Souza and Renan Almeida André, an indigenous Macuxi aged 14, were found strangled in the Maturuca Maloca.

According to the information received, these events are part of an atmosphere of violence currently taking place in Roraima. Following an administrative order in December 1998 authorizing the demarcation of indigenous lands in the Raposa/Serra do Sol area, opposition has been manifested by some political leaders, local authorities and squatters. Moreover, landowners supported by some politicians, have also carried out boycotts to that order.

Given the severity of the above-mentioned cases, we urge you to take immediate action to:

- guarantee the physical and psychological integrity of the indigenous people of the Raposa/Serra do Sol, Roraima State and, in general, of all indigenous people in Brazil;
- guarantee an impartial and exhaustive inquiry into these facts, identify those responsible, bring them before a civil competent and impartial tribunal and apply the penal, civil and/or administrative sanctions provided by law;
- ensure in all circumstances respect for human rights and fundamental liberties in accordance with national laws and international human rights standards."

