

Indigenous peoples' rights threatened



By Maria Josefina Arce

The maneuvers to dispossess indigenous communities of their territories do not stop in Brazil. Right-wing and agromarket-friendly legislators voted in favor of leaving without effect last October's veto by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of the so-called temporary framework, a thesis that makes it difficult for these peoples to reclaim their ancestral lands from which they were expelled for decades.

The thesis establishes that these communities are only entitled to the lands they physically occupied in 1988, the year in which Brazil's current Constitution was enacted.

It also ignores last September's ruling by Brazil's Supreme Federal Court that rejected the timeframe and declared it unconstitutional.

Human rights groups have pointed out that this thesis is unfair, as it does not take into account the forced expulsions and displacements of indigenous people, especially during the military dictatorship from 1964 to 1985.

Indigenous leaders affirm that the time frame excludes the historical and cultural reality of the natives, and violates international treaties signed by Brazil, such as the United Nations Declaration on Indigenous Peoples and Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization.

The threat of opening vast indigenous lands to activities such as logging, mining, agriculture and cattle ranching is once again gaining strength, threatening the survival of these peoples and efforts to curb climate change.

The scientific community considers indigenous reserves to be essential barriers against deforestation and therefore key in the fight against global warming.

The Minister of Indigenous Peoples, Sonia Guajajara, regretted the decision. She pointed out that while the world has recognized these communities and their territories as one of the last alternatives to contain climate change, Congress is acting against the grain.

The indigenous peoples' friendly relationship with the environment and their ancestral knowledge make them true guardians of nature. Respectful of natural resources, they help conserve soils, water and biodiversity.

The Congress, in its majority of right and extreme right, is once again attacking the rights of indigenous communities in order to favor the interests of the agribusiness. But the battle is not over, the Association of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil has appealed to the Supreme Federal Court to request the unconstitutionality of the entire law and to defend its prerogatives.

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