

Brazilian Indigenous women occupy health ministry in defense of rights



Brasilia, August 12 (RHC)-- Approximately 1,500 women from 113 Indigenous tribes of Brazil occupied the headquarters of the Special Secretariat of Indigenous Health (Sesai) Monday in the country's capital Brasilia in defense of the differentiated healthcare subsystem of Indigenous peoples.

"We are here representing those who have not yet come to say that we will never accept any imposition of the destructive agenda of Bolsonaro's government," Indigenous leader Sonia Guajajara said.

In a statement released after the occupation, which takes place in the midst of the activities of the first March of Indigenous Women, they expressed repudiation "of Bolsonaro government's purpose of dismantling all social institutions and policies that concern us."

The document, signed by the Brazilian Indigenous Peoples Association, denounces Provisional Measure (MP) 890, issued by far-right President Jair Bolsonaro to create the Doctors for Brazil Program, replacing the Cuban-Brazilian initiative More Doctors Program.

As well as the proposal to institute the Agency for the Development of Primary Health Care (ADAPS), which, for indigenous women, seeks to “open primary care as a market for the private sector,” in a bid to take free differentiated healthcare away from the Indigenous subsystem.

By protesting and occupying the Sesai’s building in Brasilia, the women reaffirmed “the position of our peoples against any prospect of municipalization or privatization of indigenous healthcare.”

On March 26, in a similar manner, Indigenous people occupied the building of the Ministry of Health in Curitiba, joining other protests in Bahia, Porto Velho, Brasilia, and all over the country. With their banners raised, hundreds of demonstrators emphatically called for “more health, more rights, and more respect.”

“The Indigenous health subsystem is a conquest of ours, it has to do with our struggle. It does not belong to a party or certain politics, as it was built by us,” Guarani Indigenous leader, Eloi Jacinto, told Brazil de Fato back in March.

The Special Secretariat for Indigenous Health is responsible for coordinating and implementing the National Policy on Health Care for Indigenous Peoples. Its mission is to implement a decentralized care model within the 34 Special Indigenous Health Districts.

According to the last census (2010) done by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, approximately 817,000 Brazilians classified themselves as Indigenous, occupy 12.6% of the national territory, and speak 274 different languages. It is for this, and to break down the cultural and linguistic barrier, the Sesai created the figure of Indigenous health agents, people from the community who link ancestral health and the state system.

The Federal Government proposes to close down the Sesai and municipalize these services and Indigenous healthcare. “The municipalization will damage our health because they are not able to support the Indigenous health subsystem”, argued Jacinto.

This proposal aligns with the path of the anti-Indigenous policies that Brazil is embarking on as part of its current neoliberal and far-right government.

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