



# I World Games of Indigenous Peoples

## Who wins? Who loses?

**F**rom October 23 to November 1 in 2015 the “I World Games of Indigenous Peoples” will take place in Palmas, capital of the state of Tocantins. In the light of the huge investments of the municipal, state and federal governments for the realization and publicity, within and outside of Brazil, of this “event of international importance”, which will “put Palmas on the world map of tourism, including business tourism”, it is necessary to question if the protagonists of these games, the indigenous peoples, will have any real benefit.

The event itself, costing an estimated one hundred million reais (equivalent to approximately 33 million dollars), according to the Extraordinary Municipal Secretary of the Indigenous Games, is extremely questionable in the present context, in which **many indigenous peoples face situations of extreme vulnerability, living in roadside camps, subject to hunger and cold, because they were expelled from their traditional lands**, as is the emblematic case of the Guarani-Kaiowá in Mato Grosso do Sul. Other peoples, even with their lands demarcated, are **constantly violated**

**due to invasions and the illegal exploitation of natural goods** (lumber, minerals, biodiversity) found in their lands. Regarding health and education the situation is extremely precarious and the **mortality rate for children of some indigenous peoples, such as the Xavante, is more than 800% higher than the national average for non-indigenous children**. Furthermore, it is cause for great concern **the fact that the incidence of violence and violation of indigenous peoples’ rights and the criminalization of their leaders is increasing drastically**.

In other words, in a context extremely challenging for indigenous peoples, with serious violence and unprecedented threats to their rights, it is essential to question:

- ◆ What is the objective of the I World Games of Indigenous Peoples?
- ◆ For whom is the event being held?
- ◆ Who profits and is benefited by holding them?

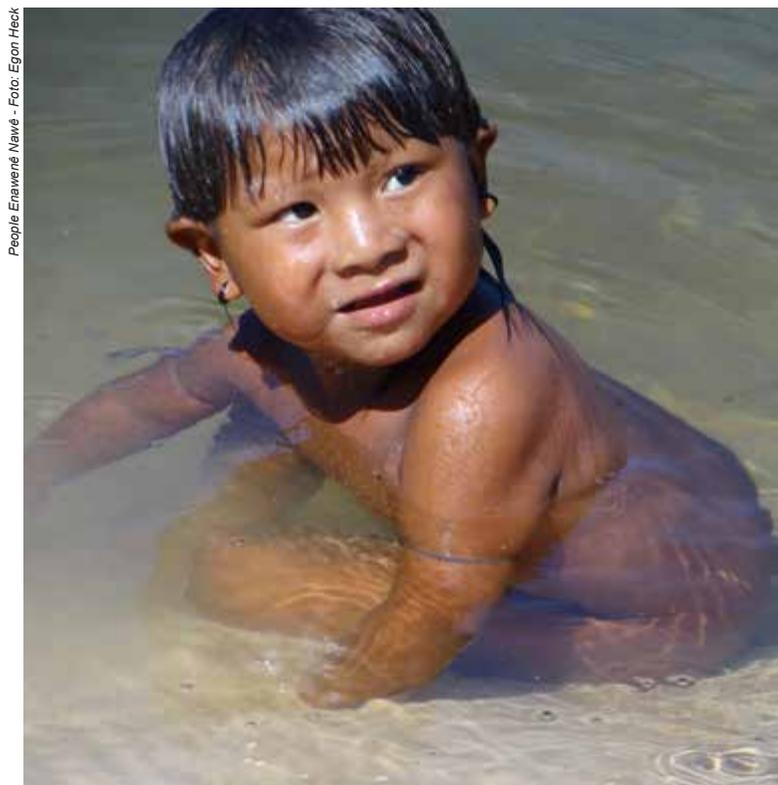
Before presenting possible responses, it is necessary better understand **who are the indigenous peoples of Brazil**.

# Indigenous Peoples in Brazil

It is perfectly feasible to affirm that **there exists a profound ignorance of Brazilian society about the reality of the original peoples of this country.** As children in school we learn history from the perspective of the Portuguese colonizers. Later, day by day, we accompany the publication of information about other countries, other peoples, issues related to world geopolitics, conflicts in the Middle East, difficulties involving innumerable refugees in various parts of the planet. But almost nothing do we know of the peoples who first inhabited these lands, of their way of life, their cultures, spiritualities, world visions, myths, knowledge and wisdom. Generally speaking, the little information we have about them is filled with prejudice and distortions.

According to the demographic census by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) in 2010, the indigenous population in Brazil was **896 thousand persons divided in 305 peoples and speaking 274 different languages.** Of this total, 17.5% do not speak Portuguese. Also, it must be considered that at the present time, there are in Brazil, the majority in the Amazon Region, more than one hundred indigenous groups/peoples in voluntary isolation, according to the National Indian Foundation (Funai). These are groups and peoples that do not want to have contact with the non-indigenous society around them. It is in this sense that we can affirm that **Brazil is a plurinational State and Brazilian society is multiethnic, multicultural and multilingual.**

It is seldom spoken that the indigenous peoples have a different perspective of civilization, called by the Quechua people *Sumak Kawsay* which means Life Well Lived. Among its basic tenets are: **life in harmony with Mother Earth, with the community and with self; reciprocity on all levels; daily experience of the sacred; valorization of the wisdom of the elders, especially their simplicity; the festive dimension of life; and a way of being that maintains equilibrium between the material e spiritual dimensions.** It refers to a way of life that is based on other values and a different perception of being, quite different from what our non-indigenous society has, in which we live with the destruction of nature in favor of progress, unfair competition, a lack of meaning for our existence, domination by the more powerful, the accumulation of



People Enawené Nawé - Foto: Egon Heck

wealth, violence and misery, among so many evils that cause a project for a society of justice and brotherhood to become unviable.

And although the Federal Constitution of 1988 guaranteed indigenous peoples the right to “their social organization, customs, languages, beliefs and traditions and their original rights to the lands that they traditionally occupy”, at the present time, the way of life and the very survival of these peoples are seriously threatened in Brazil.

## Violence against Indigenous Peoples in 2014\*

138	murders
31	attempted murders
785	infant and childhood deaths
21	deaths for lack of medical assistance
135	suicides
84	invasions of indigenous lands
118	cases of omission in the documental regulating of lands

\*Source: Report Violence Against Indigenous Peoples in Brazil – 2014 data, Cimi

People Xukuru – Photo: Laila Menezes



People Guarani-Kaiowá - Photo: Laila Menezes



# Indigenous: obstacles to “development”?

Capitalism’s key words are: accelerate, produce, exploit, commercialize. Everything must be transformed into commodity. For the continuous expansion of this model of marketing and exploitation, the appropriation of indigenous territories and their natural goods is essential. The major enterprises that violate and threaten Mother Earth are: generation of electric energy, transportation, infrastructure, mining and agribusiness. Thus indigenous peoples, who protect their land and have a sacred relationship with nature, must be eliminated.

## The Three Branches (Powers) X Indigenous Peoples

We live in a Brazil of violence and unheard of violations against the indigenous peoples and their rights. In accord with the dominant “order” and in response to the logic of accumulation of resources and capital, political and economic sectors that are anti-indigenous are strongly active in the ambient of the Three Branches (Powers) of the Republic in order to implement their structural and systematic actions against these peoples.

We consider that the fundamental directive of this attack is the attempt to take from the indigenous peoples the condition of citizens with rights recognized and affirmed in the Constitution Federal of 1988. After all, from the moment in which the rights of these peoples to their traditional territories and to the use of their natural resources are withdrawn, their lands and resources will be at the disposition of capitalist exploitation and the nature there (rivers, trees, air, land, minerals, etc.) will be transformed into commodity.

Groups financed and linked to agribusiness, to mining companies and construction contractors seek to achieve three main objectives:

- ◆ Prevent the demarcation of traditional lands that continue to be invaded;
- ◆ Reopen and reconsider procedures of demarcation of Indian territories where it is already concluded;
- ◆ Allow the invasion, exploitation and commercialization of natural resources and of the demarcated lands that are in the possession of and preserved by indigenous peoples.

**In the Legislative Branch**, the main vectors of violations are proposals that seek to block indigenous peoples’ access to fundamental rights such as their traditional lands and a protected and balanced environment. The Proposed Constitutional Amendment 215/2000 (which transfers the prerogative of demarcation of indigenous lands from the Executive to the Legislative) and the Project of Law 1610/96 (that seeks to regularize the mineral exploration in indigenous territories) are two of the principal tools used by the rural caucus and that of mining interests in this perspective. Besides these two, there are more than 180 legislative proposals in the parliament that retract or threaten rights of indigenous peoples and traditional communities. This systematic attack has demanded a permanent and intense incidence of these peoples at the National Congress in



order to avoid historic setbacks against their rights. The legislators of the rural caucus have made constant use of racist speeches and incitement to hatred and violence against these peoples, their leaders and allies.

**In the Executive Branch**, the demarcation procedures of indigenous lands are paralyzed as part of a “project of the State”. Thus Dilma’s administration remains the one that demarcated the fewest indigenous lands since the end of the military dictatorship in Brazil. The increase of conflicts over possession, murders and criminalization of indigenous leaders observed in 2014 is closely related to this unconstitutional decision of the Brazilian government.

### Ratification of Indigenous Lands by administration

Administration	Period	Number of Ratifications	Annual Average
José Sarney	1985 – 1990	67	13
Fernando Collor de Melo	Jan. 1991 sept. 1992	112	56
Itamar Franco	Oct. 1992 Dec. 1994	18	9
Fernando Henrique Cardoso	1995 – 2002	145	18
Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva	2003 – 2010	79	10
Dilma Rousseff	2011 – 2014	11	2,7

**In the Judiciary Branch**, recent decisions of the 2nd Class of the Federal Supreme Court (STF) neutralize article 231 of the Federal Constitution with a fundamentalist interpretation that radically restricts the concept of lands traditionally occupied by indigenous peoples. Decisions like that annul administrative acts of the Executive Branch demarking indigenous lands. The danger is that these decisions can be interpreted by both long-term and recent invaders of these lands as a sign that the selective murders of leaders and the use of paramilitary apparatus to expulse indigenous from their lands are legitimate, convenient and advantageous to those who intend to take possession of and exploit these lands.

## Mega projects of destruction

When the delegations of indigenous peoples of Brazil and the world enter the arenas, rivers and tracks to open the I World Games, one specific group will be very happy, no matter the performances of the indigenous athletes. It is precisely the group that defends the interests of lumber and mining industries and the contractors (who build the dams, roads, waterways, etc), of agribusiness, businessmen, politicians, that is, an ample selection of those who always act to guarantee profits for their business and who have no regard or connection with the wellbeing of the indigenous or commitment to the protection of nature. Rather, exactly this sector is responsible for grave violence, violations and threats to the rights of indigenous peoples and for the destruction of the environment in Brazil.

A gigantic event, international and unique like these games, gathers peoples from around the world with their characteristic and uncommon beauty and is publicized by governments and the media as an event that valorizes peoples and their cultures. But in reality it functions like a mask that hides the true and tragic reality of the life of these peoples in Brazil – that is not, in fact, democratic and does not respect the constitutional rights of its original peoples. **It is the ancient strategy of “circus for the people” so they forget their suffering, including in many cases the very lack of food.**

A survey by the Missionary Council for Indigenous Peoples (Cimi) in 2014, registered that in Brazil there are at least 519 projects of diverse types that affect 204 peoples in 437 indigenous territories.

Of these, 267 projects are related to the energetic sector: 131 small hydroelectric plants, 67 hydroelectric power plants, 60 power lines, besides the thermo-electric power plants.

Infrastructure is second in impact on indigenous lands, with 196 public works, especially roads.

These are followed by mining and agribusiness.

Three “development” projects of government administration in the last 45 years – “Brazilian Miracle” in the military dictatorship; “Forward Brazil”, of the Fernando Henrique Cardoso administration; “Program of Accelerated Growth” (PAC), of Lula and Dilma’s administrations – manifest an explicit option for a model of society that places profit of some historically privileged groups above the very life and dignity of the major part of the population.

Various documents and reports prove that indigenous peoples have been the major victims of this model. There are abundant examples of public works that caused the death of thousands of indigenous: the hydroelectric power plants of Itaipu, Tucuruí and Balbina; the roads and highways – Transamazon, BR 174, Belém-Brasília, BR

People Krañó - Photo: Jorge Valente



## Matopiba: the new agricultural front

In the present scenario unfavorable for indigenous rights and those of other traditional populations, Presidential Decree 8.447 was signed in May of 2015. It establishes Brazil’s last agricultural front that embraces the states of Maranhão, Tocantins, Piauí and Bahia (the abbreviations of these states form the name of the area). With an extension of more than 73 million hectares of the Cerrado biome (Brazilian Savana), this area is being considered the principal



Soybean monoculture – Photo: Renato Santana

macro region strategic for Brazilian large land holdings and agribusiness.

Within the geographic limits of Matopiba there are 28 indigenous lands, 42 areas of conservation, 865 settlements and 34 quilombos (communities of ex-slaves’ descendants). These territories are in opposition to the present hegemonic system and are contrary to

the official model of development. Thus, Matopiba will cause yet more land conflicts, expropriation of territories, destruction of the environment, exodus to the outskirts of the cities and the intensification of violence, of exclusion and of slave labor.

This new agricultural front, by the actuation of the Minister of Agriculture, Livestock and Supply, Kátia Abreu, facilitates the territorial expansion of major capital through expulsion of indigenous, quilombolas (descendants of slaves organized in communities), and other communities from their traditional territories.

101; plus the trespassing and wrongful possession of their lands for implanting agriculture and cattle raising. As a result of genocides caused in the name of “progress”, some peoples were decimated to extinction.

Worse yet, this sad reality did not remain in the past. **At this time, the construction of hydroelectric power plants in the Madeira, Tapajós and Xingu rivers and public investment in highways, and in agribusiness of sugar cane, soy and eucalyptus show that the actions of military governments continue to be implemented.**

“Innumerable serious conflicts between indigenous peoples and businesses are flaring up throughout the state of Tocantins. Many indigenous leaders are being criminalized, imprisoned, beaten or murdered at the command of ranchers and politicians”

*Antônio Apinajé, indigenous leader of the state of Tocantins*

The institutions responsible for holding the Games are: Intertribal Committee of Indigenous Memory and Science (ITC), the municipal government of Palmas, the Minister of Sports, the federal government and the United Nations Program for Development (Pnud). It is noteworthy that the Minister of Agriculture, Livestock and Supplies, Kátia Abreu, was one of the main figures in the government responsible for articulating and holding the Games and garnered ten million reais (around US\$ 2,70 million) for the event.

Feeling used and disrespected, 28 members of the Union of Krahô Chiefs signed a formal letter, sent on September 10th, 2015 to the articulation of the World Games, refusing to participate in the event.

“How can we participate in an event financed by a government that is promoting the genocide of our Guarani-Kaiowá brothers in Mato Grosso do Sul, and in various other regions of the country? How can we participate in an event promoted by Ms. Kátia Abreu, one of those with greatest responsibility for the advance of the anti-indigenous movement in our country?”

*Union of Krahô Chiefs*

“These World Games hide the true face of the government in the massacre of indigenous peoples, exalting the image of the government and of some individuals while continually negating the peoples their sacred right to their land, their culture, and their original way of life. While the government and opportunists dream of an ‘indigenous FIFA’, the dismantling, suspension and attacks on our territories show that soon all the indigenous lands together will not have space for a soccer field”

*Lindomar Terena, indigenous leader of Mato Grosso do Sul (the Brazilian state most violent with indigenous peoples)*

## World Games: for what and for whom?

Some problems raised by indigenous peoples in relation to these World Games are:

**Non-priority expenditures** – In 2014, a Funai (governmental indigenous agency) received only R\$ 10 million to regularize the nearly 700 indigenous lands throughout the country (according to data of the same organ), besides having their staff extremely reduced for a lack of funding. **On the other hand, the projected budget for holding the I World Games is estimated in more than R\$100 million** (according to the Extraordinary Municipal Secretary of the Indigenous Games);

**Distortion of the reality** – offer diversion and amply publicize a “beautiful” event to appear that indigenous peoples in Brazil live well and have their rights respected; besides taking the focus off the charges of corruption and the present political and economic crisis;

**Little participation** – of the 305 indigenous peoples in Brazil, only 26 will be participating in the Games; of the ten peoples who live in Tocantins only two will participate.

**Folklorization** – games and traditional activities that comprise the social organization of indigenous peoples, performed outside their territory for exhibition, always contain a threat of transformation of culture into folklore and the reaffirmation that indigenous are “exotic”.

**Capitalization** – games, recreational activities and traditional sports, some taking place within sacred rituals, are disconnected from their original purposes and inserted into a context of competition linked to commercialization, characteristic of the capitalist system.

**Far from being a priority** – holding the World Games is not a demand of the indigenous movement nor is it in any way linked to them.

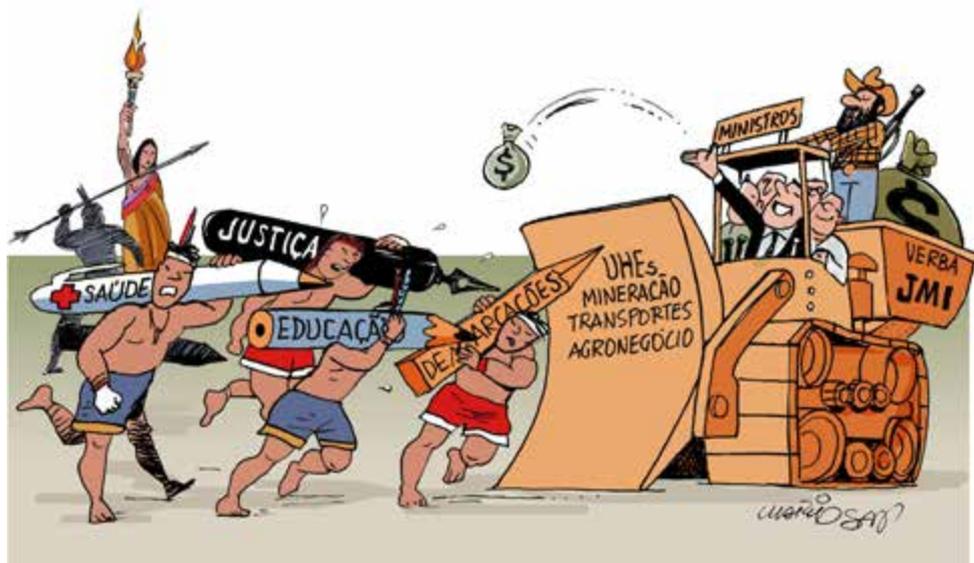
People Krahô - Photo: Laila Menezes



“Running with logs, target shooting with arrows and canoeing are daily activities and are part of the life and spirituality of indigenous peoples. In the villages, many practices and ceremonies are sacred rituals and may not be marketed, vulgarized and transformed into folklore and spectacle for non-Indian tourists”

*Antônio Apinajé, indigenous leader of the state of Tocantins*

# Demarcation of lands: the desired victory



The I World Games of Indigenous Peoples aims to be a space of valorization of the cultural diversity and human resources – a moment of integration and socializing of the original peoples from more than twenty countries, of promoting self-esteem, an event more celebrative than competitive. However, by ignoring the extreme offensive occurring with the intention of reducing and eliminating fundamental and guaranteed rights of indigenous peoples, the growing violence and criminalization of indigenous leaders, the imminent looting and destruction of traditional territories and the extremely vulnerable situation of thousands of indigenous, Brazil, the host country, tries to sustain a falsehood, for it is impossible to celebrate anything at all in the face of cultural, social and physical extinction of the original peoples of this country.

In recent decades there have been significant advances in the affirmation and achievement of indigenous rights, in the recognition of the plurinationality of some countries, of the Mother Earth's rights and of Bem Viver (Life Well Lived) as a way of life. But the great majority of countries continue to have a colonialist relation, of domination and disrespect for ethnic minorities.

“The best attitude for peace is to demarcate and respect indigenous territories that are sacred for our peoples and necessary for balancing and sustaining the climate of planet Earth. Remember that Brazil still has a debt with indigenous peoples. Throughout all of Brazil there are still hundreds of lands that must be returned to their true owners”

*Antônio Apinajé, indigenous leader of the state of Tocantins*

## Together in the indigenous peoples struggle for life

It is necessary to join our forces to the resistance and the struggle of the indigenous peoples in defense of their traditional life projects. In this regard, the involvement of civil society is fundamental:

- ◆ Become informed about the true reality of indigenous peoples in Brazil;
- ◆ Share this information with friends, colleagues and social networks;
- ◆ Participate in actions, virtual or physical, in favor of the rights and life of indigenous peoples.

## Indigenous Called

“This is the moment to come together in the struggle against our enemies. All the indigenous peoples of Brazil and the world, from North to South, East to West. Let us shout together: ‘Enough!’ Enough of the massacre, to violate our rights, to take our lands. If we do a huge mobilization in and outside of Brazil we can win this great battle for peace, for nature, for the love of life”

*Movement Ipereg'ayu and Indigenous Association Sawré Muybu, Povo Mundurucu, July 15, 2015*

People Xerente - Photo: Jorge Valente



Organism under the umbrella of the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil (CNBB)



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