

February 6, 2020

SALSA Statement Condemning the Nomination of Ricardo Lopes Dias as Head of Brazil's General Coordination of Isolated and Recently Contacted Indigenous Peoples

The Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America, an international scholarly organization composed of 500 professors, students, and practitioners, strongly condemns the nomination on Feb. 5, 2020 of Ricardo Lopes Dias to the position of coordinator of FUNAI's CGIIRC, the General Coordination of Isolated and Recently Contacted Indigenous Peoples. This nomination continues the frighteningly dangerous trend of the Brazilian government under Jair Bolsonaro discounting the rights of indigenous peoples and endangering their cultural and territorial integrity.

Trained as an anthropologist, Mr. Lopes Dias has worked for over two decades as a member of the New Tribes Mission (now Ethnos360), an evangelical religious organization founded in the U.S. in 1942 with the express aim of converting the world's isolated tribal populations to Christianity. He has worked extensively in the Vale do Javari Indigenous Territory, where indigenous groups have publicly denounced New Tribes Mission and continue to suffer from the destruction of cosmological and ethical beliefs wrought by forced evangelization. As researchers from across the globe, we speak in a united voice as advocates for ethical and humane research on issues related to lowland South America, its peoples, and its environments. Furthermore, we view religious freedom and freedom of expression as human rights enjoyed by all peoples, and are therefore deeply concerned that the appointment of a missionary to this high post will fundamentally alter FUNAI's work and endanger the cultural autonomy of groups living in voluntary isolation from the state. The primary role of FUNAI cannot be allowed to shift from being the guarantor of indigenous rights (sanctified in Articles 231 and 232 of the 1988 Constitution) to that of imposing state-sanctioned religious conversion. Furthermore, tribal peoples have a right to live in isolation from the Brazilian state and society if they so choose; the appointment of a missionary committed to the destruction of indigenous religion runs completely contrary to the mission of the CGIIRC.

Since Mr. Bolsonaro took office in early 2019, financial support for the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI) has cratered, technicians have been forbidden from pursuing their work concerning the demarcation of indigenous territories, and senior research and advocacy professionals have been dismissed or had their reputations besmirched on political grounds. While journalists and researchers from other disciplines may have perspectives on how Mr. Bolsonaro's policies are beholden to agricultural interests or a resurgent militarism, our experience as anthropologists leads us to condemn the blatant assault on indigenous peoples being carried out by Mr. Bolsonaro in name of an assimilationist agenda. We stand in solidarity with the diverse peoples and cultures of Brazil, with our colleagues in government who see the folly of Mr. Lopes Dias's appointment, and with defenders of human rights worldwide.



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Dr. Jeremy M. Campbell
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