
May 7, 2020

SALSA Denounces the Radical Posture of FUNAI in Brazil

The Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America, an international scholarly organization composed of professors, students, and practitioners, is united in voicing our strong opposition to policies proposed by Brazil's National Indian Foundation (FUNAI) that would permit the occupation and sale of land by third parties within that country's Indigenous Territories. The recently proposed institutional norm #9/2020 (from April 22, 2020) gives the green light to squatters, loggers, and land-grabbers who would seek to challenge Indigenous Territories before they are officially "homologized," the penultimate step in the territorial recognition process. Currently in Brazil there are 237 Indigenous Territories that have passed through a years-long, complex, and intensive declaration process, and are stuck in the queue awaiting homologization. It is precisely there that the proposed norm looks to give legal cover for the invasion, subdivision, and sale of Indigenous lands awaiting final demarcation. During his campaign for office, President Jair Bolsonaro promised to "not demarcate one millimeter more" land for Brazil's 305 Indigenous peoples, which account for more than 1 million of its citizens. Norm #9/2020 goes further than the government simply refraining from recognizing Indigenous territories, which itself is a violation of Brazil's Constitution and international treaties such as ILO Convention #169. This rule will ensure that Indigenous peoples awaiting demarcation will face an onslaught of new land invasions, an especially dire prospect given the global coronavirus pandemic. The threat is potentially far greater, as well, given judicial and procedural rules that aim to disestablish already-demarcated territories due to the "time stamp" (*marco temporal*) interpretation of the 1988 Brazilian Constitution. In all, Indigenous communities near expanding agricultural and mining frontiers might be forced to look on as the territorial basis of their livelihood disintegrates into lots, deeds, and bills of sale given the imprimatur of FUNAI.

SALSA also denounces in the strongest possible terms FUNAI's press release (titled "The Facts," from May 4, 2020), which demonizes advocates and anthropologists who have worked for decades alongside Brazil's Indigenous peoples to demarcate their lands. The statement is hyperbolic, labeling the past twenty years of Brazilian governments as "socialist" and alleging falsely that NGOs active in the Amazon are beholden to international conspiracies that threaten Brazilian sovereignty. In fact, since its founding in 1967 it has been FUNAI that invites and oversees anthropologists and other specialists working in technical teams to research and establish Indigenous Territories, always in consultation with Indigenous peoples.

The politically-tinged discourse is regrettable, but revelatory: FUNAI president Marcelo Augusto Xavier da Silva, a 2019 Bolsonaro appointee, appears ready to literally sell out on the agency's core mission to protect and promote the rights of Indigenous Brazilians. It is clear that, despite the hollow appeals to democracy or new policies based on "ethnodevelopment," FUNAI's leadership has been tasked with opening for sale the territories of Brazil's originary peoples without their consent or endorsement. We condemn these policies, lament the manipulative language, and call on all defenders of human rights to stand in solidarity with Brazil's Indigenous peoples.



Dr. Carlos D. Londoño Sulkin
President of SALSA



Dr. Jeremy M. Campbell
Director, Public Issues & Actions Committee