



# COMITÊ BRASILEIRO DE DEFENSORAS E DEFENSORES DE DIREITOS HUMANOS

To  
Mr. Michel Forst  
Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders  
[defenders@ohchr.org](mailto:defenders@ohchr.org)

## **Referring to: criminalization, threats and aggressions against the riverside population in conflict with the agribusiness for the water use in Correntina city, Bahia State**

**Dear Sir**

The Brazilian Committee of Human Rights Defenders<sup>1</sup>, the Associação de Advogados de Trabalhadores Rurais no Estado da Bahia (AATR), the Comissão Pastoral da Terra, the Movimento de Atingidos por Barragens, the Terra de Direitos (TDD), the Justiça Global, the Movimento Nacional dos Direitos Humanos, and the Conselho Indígenista Missionário use this way to inform and to voice their preoccupation with the events of human rights violation committed by agribusiness companies and the Brazilian State by private security agents, police force and State environment agencies against the riverside communities of Corrente River basin, a São Francisco River affluent and all the rural and urban population of Correntina city, Bahia State that suffer with the effects of strong exploration of rivers waters by irrigated monoculture projects in West Bahia.

### **1- The Antecedents**

Correntina city is in West Bahia that is inserted in the agricultural boundary that is in the greater expansion this last decade and is known as MATOPIBA representing the joining of Cerrado biome portions of Maranhão, Tocantins, Piauí and Bahia States.

In this meantime the traditional riverside communities relate the flow decrease of rivers and creeks in the last decades, also nascent disappearance mainly in the “chapadões”, the areas of reload of aquifer that supply a great number of rivers and nascent of Corrente and Grande basins, important São Francisco affluent. The traditional people and communities familiar agriculture that grow in valleys,

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<sup>1</sup> Made up by the following organizations: Artigo 19, Associação de Advogados de Trabalhadores Rurais no Estado da Bahia – AATR, Associação de Apoio a Criança e ao Adolescente – Amencar, Central do Movimentos Populares, Centro de Defesa de Direitos Humanos de Sapopemba, Centro de Defesa de Direitos Humanos Gaspar Garcia – SP, Centro de Defesa dos Direitos Humanos da Serra –ES, Coletivo Margarida Alves – MG, Comissão Pastoral da Terra – CPT, Conselho Indigenista Missionário – CIMI, CPP – Conselho Pastoral da Pesca, Dignitatis – Assessoria Técnica Popular, Grupo Tortura nunca mais da Bahia, Instituto de Direitos Humanos – MG, Justiça Global, Lajusa - Laboratório de Justiça Global e Educação em Direitos Humanos na Amazônia, Movimento dos Atingidos por Barragens, Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra, Movimento Nacional de Direitos Humanos, Rede Justiça nos Trilhos, Sociedade Maranhense dos Direitos Humanos, Sociedade Paraense de Defesa dos Direitos Humanos – SDDH, Terra de Direitos.

swamps and creeks better for the little agriculture practice suffer also with the deforestation of the region areas where they raise cattle with a system of use of communal areas by the communities that is called “fechos de pasto”.

Considering the last data provided by the Environment Ministry the biome most threatened by the agribusiness expansion in Brazil, today is the Cerrado. In a way, there are there areas on protection (conservation unities and Indian territories), but only 8.2 % of the biome, in other way, there is the most aggressive agribusiness agricultural boundary. The area with soybean grew 2535 between 2000 and 2014 and about 685 of this expansion occurred in areas os native vegetation.

The ten more deforested cities in all the biome

The ten most deforested municipalities in the entire biome, which occupy 22% of the national territory, are located in MATOPIBA, which accounts for 11% of the almost 30,000 km<sup>2</sup> deforested area in the Cerrado between 2013 and 2015. Solely in the years 2009-2010 a 36.24 km<sup>2</sup> area was deforested only in Correntina, due to expansion of agricultural areas of soy, cotton and corn with intense use of pesticides.

The expansion of monocultures of soybean, corn and cotton in the states of the region between 2000 and 2007 was carried out at a rate of 1,114 km<sup>2</sup> per year. In the following period, from 2007 to 2014, this rate increased to 1,800 km<sup>2</sup>/year (area 20% higher than that of the municipality of São Paulo). According to the data from the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (Embrapa), MATOPIBA comprises 73 million hectares within the Cerrado biome, within a territorial boundary within which there are 28 indigenous lands, 42 conservation units, 865 settlements of small farmers and 34 quilombos and 47 pasture closures.

The conflicts caused by the invasion of agriculture since the 1970s in the traditional territories of the communities that inhabit the Cerrado have been the subject of intense discussion and dozens of public hearings. The severity of these conflicts is known at a regional, state, national and even international level. However, for decades agribusiness never took responsibility for his nefarious activities, based on a tripod whose central themes are: the invasion of public land through land grabbing and banditry; the use of public money for the implantation of mega-structures and of monocultures of grains and cattle raising; the irresponsible use of natural goods, common goods, with irreversible impacts on the environment, especially on water and biodiversity, and immeasurable social impacts.

In this context, in the year 2000, riverside dwellers in the rural area of Correntina blocked a canal that sought to divert the waters of the Arrojado River, threatened by agribusiness farms in the district of Rosario. The funeral song of the “Soul Feeders”, an ancient religious tradition of praying for the dead, began to be performed to call attention to the death of hundreds of springs and rivers in the region. Demonstrations with thousands of people have been made in recent years in cities in the region in protest against the destruction of the Cerrado.

Agribusiness actions, however, have the support of the state of Bahia and of Brazil, which acts as an incentive and promoter or is insufficient or lacking in the inspections and has been colluding with its expansion through water grants and environmental permits for deforestation granted without well-defined criteria. These criteria had been undergoing intense flexibilizations due to radical changes in environmental legislation. The Institute of Environment and Water Resources (INEMA) granted the Igarashi Farm – through Ordinance No. 9.159, dated January 27, 2015 – the right to withdraw from the Arrojado River a flow of 182,203 m<sup>3</sup>/day for 14 hours/day, for the irrigation of 2,539.21ha.

This withdrawn volume of water is equivalent to more than 106 million liters per day, enough to supply more than 6.6 thousand domestic cisterns of 16,000 liters in the semi-arid region. The situation is intensified when we consider the water crisis of the São Francisco River, at a time when the dam of Sobradinho, considered the “artificial heart” of the river, has a useful volume of 2.84%. The water consumed by the population of Correntina corresponds to approximately 3 million liters per day and is equivalent to only 2.8% of the daily flow of the Arrojado River by the aforesaid farm.

## **2- On the recent popular demonstrations in defense of rivers and waters**

On the morning of November 2, 2017, there was a new popular demonstration at the Igarashi and Curitiba Farms, in the district of Rosario, municipality of Correntina. Pictures and audio files circulating on the internet supports the report that these farms would have been invaded and part of their machinery, installations and water catchment devices and irrigation apparatus would have been broken and burned, and the authors of these actions would be people of Correntina. According to reports, 500 to 1,000 people participated in the action. After the act, the Governor of Bahia, Mr. Rui Costa, immediately sent to the municipality a troop composed of a strong military and civil repression apparatus – an unprecedented situation in the region.

After a new demonstration in defense of the waters held on November 11, 2017, which brought together more than 10 thousand people in the city, there was a platoon with 100 military policemen, including shooters and the use of helicopter. The demonstration took place in a peaceful manner, but since then there has been information that municipal schools in some villages denounce that even children are suffering from severe psychological damage because of the truculent actions of the Military and Civil Police.

There are complaints that still occur, conspicuously and without judicial authorization, searches by the communities, with the active participation of the military police in an attempt to get information from people in their homes and workplaces, without even a formal subpoena. Those who have received a subpoena are called upon to provide information within a few hours of receiving the notification, which makes it impossible for a lawyer to follow up the act.

It happened also a situation in which a 17-year-old was embarrassed and threatened to sign a subpoena addressed to a relative. In this context, a climate of fear and apprehension prevails in the local communities and many people who are being sought to testify are rightly afraid of their life and physical integrity. There are reports that during the hearings at the police station, police chiefs scream, hit the table and threatening to arrest those who refuse to speak the names they want to hear, thus demonstrating a climate of intimidation and arbitrariness in the ongoing investigation.

The Brazilian Committee of Human Rights Defenders (CBDDH), came to the public and expressed extreme concern with the current scenario in Correntina, especially with the way investigations related to the demonstrations that occurred in November are conducted. According to the Committee’s public note, complaints were filed that the public servants occupied in the investigations are involved with agribusiness farmers in the region. Moreover, according to reports, there are strong indications – and witnesses – of which agents and vehicles of the Association of Cotton Producers of Bahia (ABAPA), an entity linked to agribusiness, are participating in the conduct of the investigations.

So far, all the evidence and testimonials indicate that the popular manifestation was the result of the feeling of repeated abandonment by the state and also of the awareness of the illegality and illegitimacy of a destructive and corrupt agribusiness; and above all from the revolt of the riverside people with the announced and imminent death of their rivers, an invaluable heritage for all humanity.

There is now a real state of exception in Correntina, where collective and individual freedoms and guarantees are suspended under the pretext of identifying and arresting the supposed leaders of the demonstrations, who have apparently been chosen as responsible for the police authorities.

As organizations defending human rights and peoples and communities of the countryside and of the city, **exhort to this High Commission to act with the Brazilian State so that the denunciations of arbitrariness, illegalities and violence of the repression organs of the state can be ascertained with celerity and that the investigations can be conducted legally and respecting the individual rights, guarantees and freedoms, as well as the full right of defense and the guarantee of professional orientation.**

It is **also necessary that the Brazilian State, which subscribes to numerous multilateral agreements to respect, guarantee and defend human rights, treats the popular manifestation by people of Correntina in defense of water in the space and adequate scope in which their demands and proposals can be heard and considered, repudiating the criminalization of an entire population, the social leadership and the organizations and movements that lend their support in their just struggle for a healthy environment to live.**

In view of the clear occurrence of human rights violations in the above-mentioned facts, **we expect:**

- a) **We ask that the reporter's mandate be monitoring the case;**
- b) **We reforced the importance of a visit the repporteur to Brazil;**
- c) **We reitarence the seriousness of the conflict because of the right of acces to water;**
- d) **We require that this case be included in its annual reports to the Human Rights Council**

We respectfully greet you, considering the important work carried out by the Special Rapporteurships for Human Rihgts and make ourselves available for further clarifications,

The Brazilian Committee of Human Rights Defenders.  
Associação de Advogados de Trabalhadores Rurais no Estado da Bahia (AATR)  
Comissão Pastoral da Terra  
Movimento de Atingidos por Barragens  
Terra de Direitos  
Justiça Global  
Movimento Nacional dos Direitos Humanos  
Conselho Indígenista Missionário

Kind regards,

Brasília, Novembro 28, de 2017

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