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Deadly Sins in the Brazilian Amazon

By: Bianca Jagger Date: Tuesday, April 16, 2013

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Antonia Melo protesting during Rio+20
Photo by Brent Millikan

The trampling of indigenous rights, military force used against protesters, impunity, megadams and environmental destruction. Is Brazil returning to the bad old days?

The Belo Monte Dam

The controversial [Belo Monte Dam](#), which is under construction on the Xingu River in the Brazilian state of Pará, is roughly twenty percent completed. Belo Monte will displace over 20,000 people, gravely endanger the

survival of indigenous peoples and local communities and cause irreparable environmental damage to the Brazilian Amazon.

Belo Monte will be the third largest hydroelectric plant in the world and the second-largest hydroelectric dam in Brazil. At an estimated cost of upwards of \$18 billion US dollars, the dam will stand 90 metres high, 3,545 meters long, with a planned installed capacity of over 11,000 megawatts. Belo Monte is not merely a dam. It is a megadam. It is a travesty of human rights and an [environmental crime](#). The land along the Xingu River is home to 25,000 indigenous people from 40 ethnic groups, who have lived and worked in harmony with the river for thousands of years. The Arara, Juruna and Xikrin, who are closest to Belo Monte, depend on the river for their survival: fishing, trade, and transport. The river is their lifeline.

Not for much longer. Belo Monte has already begun to seriously damage livelihoods and the environment. Local riverbank populations such as the indigenous [Jericoá](#) community say that the Xingu is no longer a source of potable water, due to contamination from construction at the Pimental site upstream. Explosions, diversion of the river flow, sedimentation and pollution caused by the preliminary earth 'coffer dams' have already had devastating impacts on fish populations in the Xingu. There is little left to eat, and no more living to be made from the river. Cofferdams have diverted approximately 5 kilometres of the Xingu's main channels into one narrow channel of 450 meters, making boat transport extremely dangerous. The Jericoá, like other indigenous communities and local populations, are also dependent on boat transport for trade, basic health and education services. In a [statement issued by the Jericoá community](#) on March 21st, they call the actions of the Brazilian government and Norte Energia, the state-controlled company behind the dam, an attempt 'to assassinate the Xingu and the people that depend upon the river for their survival.'

Belo Monte will create a 100 km "dry stretch" below the reservoir, where the Xingu will be reduced to dry season levels all year round. The land on this dry stretch includes two



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indigenous reserves, the Arara and the Juruna da Terra Indígena Paquiçamba, and a number of communities who are dependent upon the river for their livelihood and for transport. There is no road which will replace the river. The Xingu will become unrecognisable and for many, uninhabitable.

I have campaigned against Belo Monte for many years. In March 2012 I went on a fact finding mission to the Xingu. Construction on the dam had then just begun. I travelled down the Xingu in a small boat. I was accompanied by my courageous friend Antonia Melo, co-ordinator of [Xingu Vivo](#), a collective of local NGOs opposed to Belo Monte, and Ruy Marques Sposati. We saw the great red scarred coffer dams, the beginnings of Belo Monte, rearing out of the river. I met with indigenous leaders, with local communities, NGOs, government officials, extractivists - and the Bishop of the Xingu, Dr Erwin Krautler, whose concern and care for the people affected by Belo Monte was evident. I was distraught by the suffering I witnessed in the area. This dam will not only destroy the Xingu, it will change the Amazon basin forever. I published my findings in a report on the Huffington Post: [The Belo Monte Dam, an Environmental Crime](#). I urge you to read it. The people of the Xingu need our support.

Sex slavery

The Belo Monte dam has brought abhorrent practises to the Xingu. On March 13, 2013, a 16-year-old girl escaped from a 'brothel' on the Belo Monte construction site where, it was subsequently discovered, she and fourteen others had been [imprisoned](#) in 'small windowless rooms with no ventilation, with only a double bed, and... padlocks on the outside of the doors.' The women had been lured from all over the state of Para with promises of legitimate employment and security. Instead, on arrival at Belo Monte they were incarcerated, raped and exploited. A [congressional panel](#) has summoned the directors of the Belo Monte Consortium to explain how sex slavery could be conducted on the very premises of the Belo Monte dam. But I fear justice will not be done. The dam has enormous financial incentives, and the Brazilian government behind it.

This is not an isolated incident. The influx of tens of thousands of [migrant workers](#) into the nearby city of Altamira and throughout the region has caused an explosion of violent crime and sex trafficking.

Working conditions

Conditions on the construction sites of Belo Monte are atrocious. According to Brazilian newspaper [Adital](#), many of the dam workers support the protesters cause, comparing Belo Monte's labour conditions to a 'prison.' They say they would leave, but they are migrant workers, with nowhere else to go. In November 2012 [work on Belo Monte stopped](#) when disputes about pay and poor working conditions escalated into a riot among the construction workers, who 'set fire to vehicles and mattresses, vandalized offices and canteens, burnt a bus and blocked the Trans-Amazon highway.'

Protest

At four in the morning, on March 21, 2013, a hundred and fifty protesters, led by the Jericoá community, occupied the construction site of the Belo Monte Dam. The group comprised women and men - people of all ages. There were representatives of the Juruna, Xypaia, Kuruaia and Canela tribes, as well as local fishermen and displaced farmers.

The March 21st protest was the sixth time since construction began in July 2011 that work

on Belo Monte has been halted by protests. In June 2012, on the eve of the Rio+20 conference demonstrators broke through one of the coffer dams to restore the flow of the river, chanting 'Free the Xingu.' A few days later, Xicrin and Juruna indigenous protestors occupied the Pimental coffer dams for over a month, calling attention to the project's impacts and the broken promises of the Brazilian government and its private sector partners responsible for construction of Belo Monte. (I wrote an article about this protest and the failure of Rio +20, '[The Future We Want](#),' which can be found on the Huffington Post.) In January 2013, twenty leaders of the Juruna tribe blocked access roads to the construction site at Pimental, [halting work for three days](#).

The people of the Xingu are invading the construction sites of Belo Monte because they are desperate. They face the destruction of their homeland and the end of their way of life. The Belo Monte dam will displace them, in their tens of thousands; it will strip them of their livelihoods. And their voices are being ignored by the Brazilian government.

The protest on March 21st was the latest of a long line of demonstrations and legal battles against Belo Monte, stretching back nearly forty years. The people of the Xingu have opposed the dam since the 1970's. The plan for Belo Monte was devised in 1975, during the years of Brazil's dictatorship. It was then known as the Kararao dam. The project was abandoned in 1989 after widespread protest. But the scheme was redesigned between 1989 and 2002. President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva signed the contract for the Belo Monte dam with the Norte Energia consortium in 2010.

At every stage the Belo Monte dam has been opposed by the people who now live in its ever growing shadow.

The government reacted immediately to the Belo Monte protest on the morning of March 21st. They sent [troops from the National Guard](#) (Força Nacional de Segurança Pública) to the construction site to subdue it. According to a mandate from the Federal Ministry, the troops will remain onsite at Belo Monte for at least 90 days - they could stay indefinitely.

The culture of intimidation

The people of the Xingu are being silenced with military force. Not because they are a threat, but because their protests halt construction. It is obvious that the Brazilian government has decided that respecting the rights of indigenous peoples is not good for business. The tactics at Belo Monte are indicative of the troubling erosion of indigenous peoples' rights, which is happening not only in the Xingu, but at dam sites all over Brazil. Across the country, the national guard and the federal police (Polícia Federal) are being used as a show of force to oppress critics and protesters.

According to Brent Millikan of [International Rivers](#), this signals a new trend of intimidation; NGOs and protesters are being threatened with fines and imprisonment. Social action, he says, is being criminalised. Local magistrates are being called upon to issue writs of 'Mandado Proibitivo,' which amount to restraining orders for protesters, preventing them from demonstrating near the construction sites.

The Belo Monte consortium has engaged in [espionage](#) against the Belo Monte workers, protesters and local organisations opposed to the dam. In February a man was caught recording the annual meeting of Xingu Vivo, a local NGO. He immediately confessed that he had been hired by the Belo Monte consortium to infiltrate the organisation and feed information back to the consortium - and the Brazilian government's national intelligence agency ABIN.

Condemned by intergovernmental organisations

The dam has been denounced by the human rights commission of the Organisation of American States (OAS). The Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) and the ILO have condemned Belo Monte. When the OAS pronounced the lack of consultation with the indigenous people a violation of the international accords, the Brazilian government retaliated by cutting off its dues payments to the OAS and boycotted a meeting arranged by OAS in Washington DC, in October 2011. The ILO stated in a 2012 report that Brazil has violated Convention 169 which guarantees indigenous peoples the right to free, prior and informed consultation over projects that affect their lands and rights.

There are currently at least [12 lawsuits pending](#) in Brazilian courts pertaining to the Belo Monte Dam, citing, among other complaints: improper licensing, lack of consultation with local communities and affected peoples, and serious environmental concerns. In 2012 construction was halted by court order on August 14th then resumed on August 28th.

Despite the people of the Xingu's desperate opposition, despite condemnation from intergovernmental organisations and the international community at large, despite the urgent warnings of scientists that this dam is an environmental catastrophe, the construction of Belo Monte is being pushed forward.

It is clear that the Brazilian government and the Belo Monte Consortium are determined to force it through at any cost.

Environmental destruction

The Xingu is an area of outstanding natural beauty. Three streams, the Tamitataba, the Romero and the Colisu converge to form the Xingu River. For 1,979 kilometres the river wanders through grasslands, savannahs, wooded archipelagos, pouring over the great cataracts at the Fall of Itamaraca. Near its mouth the river mingles with the waters of the Amazon in a network of eanos, or natural canals. It is an immense, interconnected ecosystem supporting thousands of species: human, animal and plant life.

I consider the Amazon and the Xingu to be wonders of the world.

Belo Monte will destroy the forest, cause the extinction of many rare species of animals and plants, affect the global environment and contribute to climate change. The dam is already decimating the fish populations and hundreds of other species. The black and white-patterned Zebra Pleco fish, which is found only on the Xingu River, is likely to die out. The Sunshine Pleco (*Scobinancistrus aureatus*), the Slender Dwarf Pike Cichlid (*Teleocichla centisquama*), the Plant-eating Piranha (*Ossubtus xinguense*) and the Xingu Dart-Poison frog (*Allobates crombiei*) are other species whose existence is threatened by the dam. As the Jericoá community knows all too well, the fish near Belo Monte are nearly gone. It will not be long before the other species follow suit.

Dams across Brazil

Belo Monte is part of a plan for an overhaul of Brazil's infrastructure: [at least 34 dams are planned across the country](#), which will inundate at least 6,470 sq km of the world's largest tropical forest. All over Brazil, even now, the Amazon's waterways are being blocked and diverted. The river system that provides a fifth of the world's fresh water is being dammed, polluted and fouled up.

Everywhere, the protests of the Brazilian riverine communities are being drowned out by the sound of construction - and they are being suppressed with military and police presence.

São Luíz do Tapajós, Jatobá and Chacorão - the Munduruku

Further into the Amazon Basin, west of Belo Monte on the Tapajós river, another major Amazonian tributary, the ancestral home of the Munduruku indigenous people is being threatened by three planned mega-dams: São Luíz do Tapajós, Jatobá and Chacorão. The dams are planned by the parastatal energy company, Eletronorte and its private sector partners, among them Brazilian construction giant Camargo Correa and the engineering firm CNEC, owned by Worley Parsons of Australia. [Eletronorte also holds a 49.98% stake in Norte Energia](#), the consortium behind Belo Monte.

There are approximately 11,630 Munduruku people across Amazonas, Pará and Mato Grosso do Sul. If constructed, the dams will flood much of the Munduruku territory. Despite legal mandates by international bodies such as the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 169, the Munduruku have not been consulted by the Brazilian government on the construction of these three dams.

The Munduruku are vehemently opposed to these huge dam projects. They have seen the damage that Belo Monte has done to the Xingu.

Brutal raid at Teles Pires

In October 2012 the inhabitants of the Munduruku indigenous village known as Teles Pires, located on a river of the same name - a major tributary of the Tapajós that divides the states of Pará and Mato Grosso do Sul - expelled researchers inspecting the site of the São Luíz do Tapajós dam, which would flood over 700 square kilometres of the forest.

A month later, [on the 7th of November 2012](#) a helicopter and dozens of men in flak jackets, armed with machine guns and assault rifles, descended upon Teles Pires.

The villagers, including women, children and elderly people, were teargassed, subdued and told to lie on the ground. They lay there in the sun for many hours. They were forbidden to speak to one another in their own language. The village radio was confiscated, and the phone wires cut. [Memory cards, phones, and cameras were destroyed and thrown into the river.](#)

This brutal raid was carried out not by guerrillas or militia in a military dictatorship, but by the Brazilian Federal Police and the National Guard.

Those villagers who resisted were dealt with harshly. Some were beaten and shot at, sprayed with pepper spray. Several people were seriously injured and one man, Adenilson Kirixi Munduruku was killed. His body was thrown in the river, perhaps for the purposes of concealment; it resurfaced the next day. According to reports a bomb was let off to confuse the scene of the crime.

Meanwhile the police destroyed a river dredge in front of the village, which had been used to extract gold - which was the ostensible cause for the police operation. Mining is not permitted in the area. All the contents of the dredge were also destroyed including a fridge and a gas cooker. The river was left swimming in petrol and chemicals.

Was the small gold dredge the real reason for the raid? According to Munduruku leaders, the operation was a blunt message from President Dilma Rousseff's administration to

indigenous peoples: either suspend immediately protests against the government's ambitious dam-building plans for Tapajós and its tributaries - or face the consequences. As at Belo Monte, it seems the Brazilian government has been quick to answer resistance with a show of military and police force.

A declaration of war

In late March 2013 following a presidential decree signed by President Rousseff, [the Brazilian Air Force deployed a task force of some 240 troops](#), with participation of the National Guard (Força Nacional), Federal Police and Federal Highway Police to the tiny Itaituba airport near the Munduruku village of Sawyré Mubú. The purpose of the mission, known as Operation Tapajós, has been to provide security for 80 members of private consultancy firms engaged in technical studies for the São Luiz and Jatobá mega-dam projects. As in Belo Monte, there is no indication how long the troops will remain.

The Munduruku have suspended talks with the government until the troops are withdrawn. Their [public statement reads](#): 'We are not criminals. We feel betrayed, humiliated and disrespected. We want dialogue... Our final warning. If the operation does not stop... we will have war.'

All of this military and police presence is being imposed upon indigenous and tribal people - unarmed communities. The [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), is being openly flouted. Belo Monte and Munduruku are being occupied - by corporate interest.

The Brazilian government's parastatal energy giant Eletrobras doesn't want the delays the protesters cause to planning and construction at Belo Monte or at the sites of the planned Tapajós megadams. They are steamrolling human rights for profit - with the blessing of the Brazilian government.

The Madeira Dam

The Madeira complex in the state of Rondônia will consist of four dams: the Santo Antonio and Jirau which are already well underway, the Cachuela Esperanza Dam on the Beni River near Riberalta, Bolivia which is nearly ready for construction and the Guajará-Mirim Dam on the Madeira River upstream from Abunã, which is in the planning stages. When it is completed in 2015, the [Jirau hydroelectric dam](#) will span 8km of the Madeira river and contain the largest number of giant turbines of any dam in the world. 2,250km of power lines will run between the Jirau and São Paulo.

I visited the Madeira River on my fact finding mission to Brazil in 2012. I attended an open meeting in the town hall, where I met with local communities and indigenous people. The stories I heard were tragically familiar: people were being evicted from their ancestral homeland: some had brought their orders of eviction to show me. Some told of their houses being flooded, and avalanches caused by the dams. Others told me of the sudden decline in the fish populations. I listened to their concerns, their accounts of the destruction of their livelihoods and their cultural identity by the Madeira Dam complex.

Slave labour

Like Belo Monte, the Madeira dam complex is being constructed by exploitative labour. Workers flooded into the region drawn by the promise of employment. In September 2009, Brazilian authorities found 38 people working in 'slave-like labour conditions' in the construction site of Vila Mutum. According to the [report](#) the workers living arrangements

were 'subhuman... an overcrowded wooden shelter, with no beds, no adequate electricity or sanitary facilities.' In 2011 riots broke out on the San Antonio and Jirau dam construction sites. According to [Amazon Watch](#), protesting workers set fire to buses, living quarters and offices.

Several [isolated indigenous peoples](#) live near the Madeira, including the Mujica Nava and the uncontacted Jacareuba/Katawixi Indians. What will happen to them when the dams are built? What will they do when the river changes forever?

All this, and yet the Jirau and the downstream Santo Antonio complex will provide just [5 percent](#) of what government energy planners say Brazil will need in the next 10 years.

Intimidation across Brazil

The culture of intimidation is not restricted to dam sites. The heavy handed measures being taken by the Brazilian government may signal a return to the old, dark days, to a culture of impunity in which persecution, harassment and even the murder of protesters is escalating - all across Brazil. According to the [Catholic Church's Pastoral Land Commission](#) (CPT), the number of activists threatened in conflicts over land rose from 125 to 347 between 2010 and 2011.

[Cícero Guedes](#), a leader of the landless movement, or MST, which campaigns for land reform and the rights of landless workers, was shot dead in Campos north-east of Rio de Janeiro on the evening of the 25th of January 2013. He was cycling home.

Mr Guedes, a sugar-cane cutter, had recently led an occupation of the nearby Usina Cambahyba sugar plant, in protest at a judge's ruling that the estate should be expropriated.

[Jose Claudio Ribeiro da Silva and his wife Maria were gunned down on a bridge near the reserve of Nova Ipxuna in 2011](#). Two men were convicted, and landowner Jose Rodrigues Moreira was accused of hiring the assassins to shoot the couple after they opposed the eviction of three families who lived on his farm.

Some had hoped Moreira's trial would prove to be a landmark in Brazilian land dispute killings - but he was acquitted on April 4th, 2013.

A delegation of laureates from the [Right Livelihood Award](#), otherwise known as the alternative Nobel Prize, organised a mission to Marabá to report on the trial. Marianne Andersson (former Member of the Swedish Parliament), Angie Zelter (Trident Ploughshares) and Dr Raul Montenegro (President of FUNAM, Fundación para la defensa del ambiente) were shocked by the results of the trial. 'It is unacceptable that people committed to the common good can receive a bullet to the head because they are defending the rights of the dispossessed,' Dr Montenegro said. 'The Brazilian government and the Brazilian justice system must put an end to impunity, and the murders.'

[Mercedes Queiroz](#), a friend of the da Silvas, told Al Jazeera English: "Everyone is upset with the verdict. Once more there is a feeling that impunity reigns in the Amazon region."

In November 2011, [Nisio Gomes, a leader of the Guarani Kaiowa tribe was shot dead by a group of 42 armed men](#) who broke into camp in the middle of the night. The men reportedly shot him in the head, chest, arms and legs, before taking his body away in a truck. His body has not been recovered. The Guarani Kaiowa were occupying their ancestral land in Ponta Pora, in the southern state of Mato Grosso do Sul - they had been evicted when the land was given over to cattle ranchers.

In July 2012 ten men from a private security firm were arrested for the murder. They claim landowners hired them to kill Mr Gomes. Six landowners have subsequently been arrested.

It should come as no surprise that land disputes in Brazil are rife, and highly dangerous: when [one percent of the population controls 46 percent of the country's cultivated land](#). This is a glaring inequity, and it seems the rights of indigenous peoples are the first to be sacrificed in the name of development and profit. If the Brazilian government does not take action to protect those rights, and prosecute criminals with the full weight of the law, murders like these will become all too common.

Mining in indigenous territories

The indigenous peoples of Brazil may soon face even greater challenges in their struggle to retain their ancestral land. There is a draft bill on mining currently working its way through the Brazilian Congress, known as Projeto de Lei 1610. Its aim is to open up and regulate large scale mining in indigenous territories.

According to Fiona Watson of Survival International, 'One of the objectives of the government's drive to build so many hydro-electric dams in the Amazon is to provide cheap subsidized energy to the mining companies which are poised to mine in indigenous lands.'

There are currently over 4,000 requests to mine in indigenous territories, and new requests are made every day. The mining requests in the Xikrin territories, Xikrin do Catete and Baú in Pará cover 100 percent and 93 percent of the territories respectively. 'Very worryingly,' says Watson, 'there do not appear to be any safeguards in the bill to prevent 100 percent of any given territory being mined.'

In the cases of both Belo Monte and the Tapajós, there is a clear connection between construction of mega-dams and mineral exploitation, both of which have devastating impacts on indigenous cultures their ancestral lands and the environment, since much of the electricity will go to energy-intensive mining industries.

Dams and development

Those who suffer most from these irresponsible destructive projects rarely see any benefit from them. It is large corporations, investors and the government who profit. [As Peter Bosshard writes for International Rivers](#), 'Mega-dams and other complex, centralized infrastructure projects have a bad track record in terms of addressing the water and energy needs of the poor and reducing poverty more generally.'

Examination of other megadams across the world does not bode well for the future of the Amazon and its peoples. The [Three Gorges Dam](#) in China, the largest dam in the world, displaced 1.2 million people, flooded 13 cities and 140 towns. The Brazilian/ Paraguayan [Itaipu Dam](#) displaced 59,000 people, and destroyed 700 square kilometers of rainforest. In the worst dam disaster in history, the flooding at the Banqiao Dam in China in 1975, 26,000 people died in the flooding and another 145,000 died during subsequent epidemics and famine.

Donor governments came together in Paris, France from March 20 to 21, 2013 to start negotiations for the 17th replenishment of the [International Development Association](#) fund. To my surprise, the World Bank is recommending several large dam projects as regional infrastructure initiatives, including the Inga 3 dam on the Congo River, and hydropower

projects on the Zambezi River. I hope World Bank President Jim Yong Kim will reconsider this decision.

The World Wild Life Fund (WWF) recently published a report, [The Seven Sins of Dam Building](#). The list of sins is comprehensive: building on the wrong river, neglecting downstream flows, neglecting biodiversity, falling for bad economics, failing to acquire the social license to operate, mishandling risks and impacts and blindly following temptation, and the bias to build.

The WWF report ascribes just five of these evils to Belo Monte. But actually the Belo Monte Dam commits every single one of these sins. This dam is an act of hubris and greed, committed in the name of development - but the real objective is profit.

Belo Monte is being promoted as a source of green energy. As Dr Erwin Kräutler, the Bishop of Xingu, and a staunch opponent of the dam, said to me, 'they call it a green project. What is green about Belo Monte? It will only be green if they paint the dam green. It used to be green around here. The forest was green.'

Large dams are not sustainable. They are not 'clean' energy. But they are lucrative- for some. Large international companies like Alstom, Andritz, Voith Hydro and Daimler, all of whom are involved in the construction of Belo Monte, are profiting from the dam at the expense of the tens of thousands of people who call the Xingu their home. By persisting with this unconscionable project, President Rousseff is failing her people.

The Brazilian government claims that the planned installed capacity of the Belo Monte Dam complex will bring cheap energy to households across Brazil. But it is estimated that only 70% of the energy generated by the megadam will be sold for public consumption. [The remaining 30% has already been bought by Eletrobras](#) and earmarked for export, mining and industrial activities.

The farcical, tragic reality is: Belo Monte probably won't be capable of delivering the promised, massive output. The installed capacity of 11,000 Megawatts (MW) will on average only generate 4,500 MW due to large seasonal variations in river flow. During the dry season, when the river is at its lowest level, the dam will only be able to produce 233 MW.

Which is why there are five other dams planned upstream.

As [Philip Fearnside](#) points out, 'Belo Monte itself is economically unviable because the highly seasonal water flow in the river would leave the 11,000 MW main powerhouse completely idle during 3-4 months out of the year... It suggests that the government and the investors are, in fact, counting on the upstream dams that would flood vast areas of indigenous land and tropical forest.'

A study by [Conservation Strategy Fund](#) (CSF) concludes that Belo Monte will not be sustainable without the proposed Altamira (Babaquara) dam which would have a reservoir 12 times the size of Belo Monte's and would flood indigenous territories of the Araweté/Igarapé Ipixuna, Koatinemo, Arara, Kararaô and Cachoeira Seca do Ipirí tribes.

All the evidence suggests that the Brazilian government will need to build more dams to make the Belo Monte Dam viable. Belo Monte is only the beginning.

Conclusion

By prioritising these large infrastructure projects at immense cost to the people and the

environment, by suppressing protest with military force, by condoning the appalling conditions in these construction sites, by failing to prevent the murder of protesters and indigenous and grassroots leaders, the Brazilian government is sending the dangerous message that the pursuit of profit prevails over human rights and the rule of law.

These are the facts. If Belo Monte and the other dams are allowed to go ahead, they will devastate the livelihoods of thousands of people among the tribes and communities in the Amazon Basin. A great part of Brazil's rich, varied cultural heritage will be lost. The dams will destroy enormous tracts of rainforest, unique ecosystems- the like of which cannot be found anywhere else on earth. The patrimony of Brazil will be squandered, and for what? The dams will not provide the energy the country needs.


I add my voice to the indigenous peoples' appeal to President Rousseff to stop the construction of megadams across the country.

We must support the indigenous peoples and communities whose livelihoods, culture and ancestral lands are threatened by megadams, mining, cattle ranching and illegal logging in the Brazilian Amazon. President Rousseff must examine the government's current model of development and its policies towards indigenous peoples, local communities and the environment. President Rousseff has a choice. She can steer Brazil towards a sustainable future, based on principles of respect for human rights, good governance, justice, equity and environmental protection. If however the President fails to reform the current model of development, if she continues down this path, Brazil may slip back into an era of violence, exploitation and civil unrest.

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