

Presidência da República Federativa do Brasil
Palácio do Planalto
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Brasília - DF / 70150-900

Honorable Presidente de La Republica Dilma Rousseff

The membership of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America (SALSA), a professional association of scholars specializing in Lowland South America, wishes to express its concern regarding the proposed Belo Monte hydroelectric project in the Amazonian state of Para. Brazil has earned the respect of the international community for its Amazon Rainforest, the largest remaining rainforest in the world, and we are concerned that the construction of this project will negatively impact on the advances already made. We would hope that the Brazilian government would avoid such embarrassment. Recent steps by Brazil to reduce deforestation by the year 2020 have shown that Brazil is a leader among nations in the conservation and preservations of its forests. For this reason we write regarding what we consider to be a major error in national-level planning: the Belo Monte Hydroelectric Project.

We believe that the project would have disastrous social, cultural, ecological, economic, and political effects on indigenous and other people living along the Xingu River. It would destroy a large segment of tropical rainforest in one of the most important river basins in the world. The increased settlement and deforestation would open the southeastern Amazon to increased degradation from expanding agriculture and ranching, and thereby endanger all of Amazonia. The devastation wreaked by the project is in no way compensated by the returns of the project, which would clearly be insufficient to accomplish the promised rewards. Taking into consideration the relatively short life-expectancy of dams in the Amazon because of silting and acidic erosion of turbine blades, the Belo Monte dam seems likely to prove to be an economic white elephant. In short, SALSA strongly advises the immediate stoppage of all plans toward this project.

Among other reasons for this conclusion are the following highlighted social and environmental problems:

The Xingu River is one of the major tributaries of the Amazon. With its numerous affluents it has created a basin twice the size of the country of Ecuador that remains perhaps the least disturbed and most diverse ecosystem in Brazilian Amazonia. It is unquestionably the most culturally diverse region in the Brazilian Amazon, home to over 24 indigenous peoples of distinct cultures and languages. Over the years, this variegated system of social and cultural groups has evolved a relatively sustainable pattern of coexistence with one another and the even more varied riverine and forest ecosystems of the Xingu basin. All of these systems, however, would be gravely imperiled by the federal government's plan to build a series of six giant hydroelectric dams along the Xingu and its largest tributary, the Iriri.

- The 60-mile section of river that would be diverted to pass through the turbines and thus drained of its water now passes through two indigenous reservations (Arará and Paquiçamba-Juruna), whose people depend on the river for fish and transportation. The villages they currently occupy would thus become unviable. The Xikrin of Trincadeira-Bacajá would also be deprived of a much-used transport route and, as yet to be determined, access to natural resources. The Brazilian Constitution of 1988 mandates that indigenous communities must be consulted in advance before development projects are carried out within their reserved territories, and that all local peoples must be given a chance to discuss with responsible officials any government projects that will affect their livelihoods.

- The social and environmental effects of the project on native communities are already evident. The events unleashed by the planning of the dam have already brought about dislocation, suffering and profound stress to indigenous communities located on the Great Bend of the Xingu and its affluent, the Bakajá River. For example, the movement of technical teams into and throughout the Juruna do Km 17, Juruna do Paquiçamba, Terra Wangã, and Trincheira-Bacajá Reserves is a source of major disturbance. In the newest of these reserves non-Indian inhabitants have not yet been removed. Under this assault communities have no chance to assess their situation realistically and chart possible alternatives regarding the alteration of their natural and social surroundings, **thus rendering irrelevant their constitutional rights to consultation. The same applies to** Brazilian settler communities of the Xingu who are similarly threatened by the projected dams, and who have yet to participate fully in the legally mandated evaluation and consultation process.
- The Installation License for the Belo Monte project was issued in defiance of the Federal Public Prosecutor (Ministério Público Federal) and the Organization of American States. According to the Instituto Socio-Ambiental and the Xingu Forever movement, only two of the 26 procedures specified by the FUNAI as conditions for the project to move ahead have actually been met. The Public Ministry (MPF) [referred to as "public prosecutor" above], an autonomous governmental agency empowered to decide on the constitutionality and legality of government projects and actions, has openly denounced the Belo Monte dam project as illegal and in violation of the constitution, and moreover as likely to produce an environmental catastrophe in the Xingu. The government has failed to produce a satisfactory environmental impact assessment, which is legally required as the prerequisite for the issue of a license to build the dam. Instead, the license was released, under intense political pressure, in the absence of a completed E.I.A., in a clear violation of legal requirements.
- As an example of the previous point, the study relevant to the Xikrin reservation of Trincheira-Bakajá will not be completed until April 2012. Further disruptions will accompany the constructions and maintenance of the dam. The movement of non-Indians to the lake resulting from flooding will bring these into contact with the inhabitants of Paquiçamba, unless the projected area of the reservation is extended up to the flooded area. Gold prospectors will be attracted to the non-demarcated territory lying between the Trincheira-Bacajá and Terra Wangã reserve. Logging, cattle ranching and agricultural initiatives, such as cacao plantations, already exist in this region. The presence of unprotected territory between reserves threatens game and riverine resources within protected areas. The movement of game through the entire Bacajá river basin, as well as the flow of fish, turtles, plants, nutrients and their availability for indigenous use, risks disruption.
- Finally, a significant consequence of dam construction will be the drying out of river channels—an eventuality not foreseen in legislation on the impacts of construction projects. This is a major alteration to the ecology of the region, endangering lifeways and food security. It threatens both the physical and cultural survival of the indigenous peoples living in the region. These people have neither been adequately informed, nor have they been properly consulted.

The current letter reiterates and augments a previous letter from the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America in which we expressed our support for the General Assembly of the Brazilian Anthropology Association's (ABA) motion (August 4, 2010) condemning the government's violation of due process in approving the implementation of development and infrastructure projects. The international membership of SALSA is particularly concerned that the Brazilian government, in its desire to pass the licensing and construction of hydroelectric plants on the Xingú River, has ignored the legal measures for protecting the human rights of 45,000 people, many of them indigenous and therefore protected by Article 231 of the Constitution of Brazil. We remind those parties that the area affected by the dams on the Xingu includes no less than twenty-four indigenous groups, whose rights to the lands and rivers they occupy are

guaranteed by the Brazilian Constitution of 1988, Document No. 169 1989 of the International Labor Organization, UN approval of the Brazilian Congress on 4/19/2004 (LEI Decree 5051), and the 2007 Declaration of the UN on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Since the referendum in favor of the construction of the Belo Monte dam was passed by the Brazilian Congress in 2005, indigenous peoples and local Brazilian inhabitants of the Xingú Valley have been expressing their disagreement through numerous events and public statements. Our Society of anthropologists adds its voice to those of the inhabitants and defenders of the threatened ecosystem, cultures, and social communities of the Xingú Valley in calling for the suspension of the proposed Belo Monte dam and all other hydroelectric dam projects in the Xingú River basin.

Respectfully,

Beth A. Conklin, President
The Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America (SALSA)