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BRAZILIAN CHURCH BLAMES GOVERNMENT FOR INDIAN MASSACRES

Statement by the Indian Missionary Council (CIMI) and the Pastoral Land Commission, 6 April 1988

In a strongly worded joint statement, two agencies of the Brazilian Catholic Church, the Indian Missionary Council, CIMI, and the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT) blame the Brazilian government's indifference and connivence for creating the situation which made possible the massacre of 14 Tikuna Indians on 28 March. The two agencies also report the murder and mutilation in southern Bahia of Djalma Lima, a leader of the Pataxo-ha-ha-hae. The church agencies accuse the National Security Council of illegally delaying legal protection for 90% of the Tikuna's land under the military's Calha Norte security and development plan for Brazil's northern frontier region.

Another cause of the violence, say the two agencies, is the Brazilian government's failure to implement a land reform, driving landless peasants to invade Indian land. In this way, they say, the government is 'pitting the weak against the weak' in order that powerful economic groups may reap the benefit.

It is now a matter of honour, say CIMI and the CPT, for Brazilian policy towards tribal peoples to be changed. They reject government charges that they have incited Indians against squatters, accusing the government of trying to divert attention from its own responsibility and to discredit 'these inconvenient witnesses of its indifference and complicity'.

TEXT FOLLOWS

1) On 28 March last, in a planned operation of extreme brutality, 14 Tikuna Indians were murdered and 21 others injured, without distinction of age or sex. The massacre took place in the tribal area of Sao Leopoldo, on the Upper River Solimoes, in the district of Benjamin Constant in Amazonas state. Investigations carried out so far point to the timber contractor Oscar Castelo Branco as the principal culprit in the massacre. It was the worst killing of Indians in Brazil in recent years, comparable only with the massacre of the 11th parallel in 1963, when 15 Longbelts were killed by two rubber-tappers.

2) And on the following day, the body of Djalma Lima, of the Pataxo Ha-Hae-Hae tribe was found on the borders of the Sao Lucas tribal area, in the district of Paul-Brazil, in southern Bahia, with an object belonging to the landowner Pedro Leite. Djalma Lima had disappeared on 21 March, after a confrontation with agents of the landowner. Djalma Lima, according to the Indians who accompanied the police in the investigations, had had his scalp and nails torn off and his genitals cut off before being

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killed.

3) The background to both these incidents is the already tragic battle of the Indians for their land. The Tikuna Indians have been for many years calling on the government to give legal recognition (demarcation) to their areas as a guarantee against the continual invasions. However, so far they have only obtained the demarcation of 10 per cent of the land to which they are entitled under Brazilian law. The other 90 per cent are awaiting a decision by the general secretariat of the National Security Council. The government's reluctance to recognise the legal rights of the Tikuna encourages the invasion not merely of areas not yet enjoying legal protection, but also of those already protected, generating a climate of tension which has become permanent in the region. The refusal of the general secretariat of the National Security Council to allow the process of granting legal protection to continue, in defiance of the law, has as its main objective to force the Indians to accept the reduction of the territory to which they have a right under the law and to accept, instead of full legal protection for Indian areas, the establishment of Indian colonies, a structure established illegally by decree 94.946/87.

4) For their part, the Pataxo Ha-Ha-Hae Indians are victims of the violence which claimed the life of Djalma Lima at the precise moment at which they are formulating a draft agreement intended to end a conflict over their lands which has been increasing since April 1982. For the landowners engaged in finally seizing stolen Indian land, it is important to smash the Pataxo organisation. Having survived innumerable attempts by the government and the landowners to divide them, ^{they} are fighting to maintain their internal cohesion around a proposal to solve the conflict. In this case too, the delay of the government agencies in implementing the alternative formulated by the Indians has encouraged frequent acts of violence against the Pataxo-ha-ha-hae. Djalma Lima was the seventh member of this people to have been murdered in recent years.

5) Both cases demonstrate the disastrous and demoralising effect of government policy on Indian rights. Instead of being committed to respecting, and ensuring respect for, the legal rights of Indians in Brazil, the government is the first to disregard them. In the Amazon region it has established the Calha Norte project on the pretext of, among other things, freeing resources to give legal recognition to tribal areas and to guarantee structures which will make possible adequate protection for the Indians of the region. The massacre of the Tikuna reveals that the pretext was no more than a trick: The Calha Norte project is being openly implemented and yet the tribal areas already legally protected continue to be invaded, and those considered by the government to be too large are left without any care. The most dramatic cases, and most shameful for Brazil, are those of the Yanomami and the Tikuna.

5) In the case of the Pataxo-ha-ha-hae, no practical initiative for a solution has come from the federal agencies. On the contrary, the resistance of the Pataxo has been matched by a parallel series of clumsy and inconsistent measures highhandedly imposed by the government.

6) This general situation of open and malicious disregard-backed by the government - for rights enshrined in law is creating a general sense of impunity which is encouraging every type of hostility and violence against the Indians.

7) Nothing, under any circumstances, justifies butchery. Nonetheless we know that the lumber contractor Oscar Castelo Branco took advantage of dispossessed squatters and used them for his own ends. The acts of violence against the Tikuna are also the result of a criminal delay in implementing an agrarian reform which would make it possible for squatters to be settled in dignified conditions. This delay favours the involvement of these squatters in disputes which benefit political and economic interests of the dominant classes. In the end it is the blatant use of a tactic as old as it is immoral, pitting the weak against the weak, so that the resulting conflict will leave greater pickings for big economic groups.

8) However, everything must have a limit. Recent years, coinciding with the term of the present government, have shown the highest level of violence against tribal people in the recent history of Brazil. The cost of these acts of violence in Indian blood is clear evidence that the government's Indian policy is the decisive cause of these episodes. Its immediate revision is a question of honour.

9) The first step, however, is the complete investigation of the facts, including the establishment of the occurrence of the crime of genocide, and the exemplary punishment of those responsible. The executive, judicial and legislative authorities, within the area of their respective competence, have a duty to take all necessary measures to prevent the massacre of the Tikuna and the murder of Djalma Lima from leaving a permanent stain on the honour of this generation of Brazilians.

10) It is the facts, and not their dissemination, which compromise the image of the country. The only way to rehabilitate Brazil's image is the firm punishment of the culprits, direct and indirect.

11) In this connection CIMI and the CPT repudiate the statements which government officials have been so thoughtlessly issuing blaming them for these episodes. The pastoral work carried out by these two agencies includes the constant provision, to Indians and squatters, of the legal rights they enjoy, and encouragement of their organisations to fight to have these rights respected. Such activity cannot, in any way, be confused with incitement. This confusion, however, is the very object of those who make

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these accusations and thereby seek to divert attention from the share of responsibility which they undoubtedly bear as agents of government policy. They also seek to slander the work of all who have committed themselves to the struggle for the rights of Indians and squatters, fostering inconsistent doubts in order to justify the constant repression they exert against the work of CIMI and the CPT, those inconvenient witnesses of government indifference and connivance.

12) Brazilians are ashamed at these acts of violence. Let us hope that at the level of government there exists sufficient integrity to respond adequately to the people's desire for justice.

FURTHER INFORMATION: FRANCIS MCDONAGH

PHONE LONDON 354 0883 (OFFICE HOURS) OR 241 1737 (HOME)