

Denunciation of quilombola human rights violations of Alto Rio Acará/PA - Brazil (Balsa, Turi-Açu, Palmares and Gonçalves) by the Agropalma S/A company

Quilombos Committee / By the Brazilian Anthropology Association (ABA)

Through the Quilombo Committee, the Brazilian Anthropology Association (ABA) once again denounced Human Rights violation actions against quilombola families in the Alto Rio Acará, a territory located in the Amazon region (Balsa, Turiaçu, Palmares and Gonçalves communities).

The actions have been promoted by Agropalma S/A, a worldwide supplier of palm oil to large national and multinational food companies. On February 6, 2022, quilombola¹ families crossed the Acará River to retake part of the territory usurped in the 1980s by Agropalma S/A. In this area four community cemeteries are located. Three of them have a linkage with the founding ancestors of the quilombo and with other indigenous peoples of the Tembê ethnic group, who were also expelled from the areas in the same period. These cemeteries attest to the existence of a multi-ethnic territory torn apart by oil palm monoculture in the upper Acará River region. The day after this act, quilombola families were cornered by the company's armed and hooded security guards. On February 9, new violent attacks were carried out, with threats to a group of quilombolas, including women and children, by security guards at the service of the company, even preventing them from leaving to purchase food and drinking water, characterising restriction and deprivation of liberty. As part of this violent action, the [company's machines work to open deep trenches, placing containers guarded by security guards in a show of force intended to hinder the free movement of quilombolas in those areas.](#)

Conflicts have dragged on since the 1980s, promoted by the intensification of palm production. Among the consequences of establishing palm oil plantations was the dispersion of traditional people in this territory. Groups including indigenous peoples such as the Tembê and the quilombolas were affected. Families underwent a long process of expropriation, compulsory relocation, control of movement, in addition to different types of threats.

The territory claimed by the quilombolas of Balsa, Turiaçu, Palmares and Gonçalves covers an area of more than 18 thousand hectares, of which 72% are intruded by rural environmental registers of the company Agropalma. The site is illegally registered in the Rural Environmental Registration System of the State of Pará (SICAR/PA). The recognition of this domain as the ethnically configured territory compose a judicial suit under process nº 2016/330821 at the Institute of Pará State Lands (ITERPA), claiming the area as owned originally by Quilombolas of Balsa, Turiaçu, Palmares and Gonçalves and Tembê indigenous ethnicity. However, the land regularization process is moving slowly. Recently, the board of the Association of Quilombola Communities of

Balsa/Palmares/Turiaçãoçu and Gonçalves contested a technical report from the land agency, which, in an abusive and authoritarian manner, had denied the ethnic identity of the referenced group.

The State's sluggish recognition of territorial rights has drastically worsened the situation for traditional communities in this area (quilombolas, indigenous people, riverside dwellers, fishermen) and facilitated the intensification of Agropalma's operations. Furthermore, the implementation of new projects in the region tends to put even more pressure on the traditional peoples and communities of the Upper Rio Acará. Among them are the 17 mining titles in favor of Agropalma S.A, covering an area of over 121 thousand hectares; the paving of State Highway PA-256 and the construction of a bridge over the Acará River, which will cross the Balsa community, made up of quilombolas and Tembé indigenous people expelled by oil palm cultivation; the construction of the Paraense Railway, which will cut the quilombola territory in half, and the creation of an ecological corridor encompassing private environmental reserves owned by Agropalma and Brasil Biofuels, meant for marketing carbon credits. This week, the company Agropalma filed a lawsuit to repossess the land, contrary to the legally guaranteed quilombola rights.

The situations of violation of rights have been denounced at different times by the families of the quilombola communities to the responsible authorities and institutions, but without obtaining any kind of concrete response from the relevant bodies about the defence of human and territorial rights. Among the complaints made to the offices of the Agrarian Prosecutor (MPPA) and Agrarian Defender of the Public Ministry of the State of Pará are the illegal actions by the company Agropalma, such as land grabbing, forgery of documents, intimidation of quilombolas, prohibition of fishing in the river, impediment of free access to cemeteries, forests and areas of common use, among others. These complaints were accepted by the MPPA, between 2018 and 2020, and taken to the Court of Justice of the State of Pará, who withdrew Agropalma's illegally acquired rights to the "Red de Fogo, Castanheira and Porto Alto farms".. The Public Ministry declared the aforementioned real estate records to be illegal. The decision, however, did not prevent the company from continuing to exploit the areas acquired illegally. The court decision failed to address the history of violence and aggression against quilombola families, through the support of a private security company, SegurPro. As a consequence of the conflicts and the illegality of the situation, the Public Defender's Office of the State of Pará, proposed to the Court of Justice of Pará, on February 10, 2022, a Public Civil Action against the State of Pará, the Institute of Terras of Pará (ITERPA) and the Agropalmas S.A. company.

Although the Public Ministry of the State of Pará warned Agropalma to refrain from preventing people from having access to its territory, including its constitutionally guaranteed cemeteries, the company has yet to comply. This situation has worsened, as the quilombolas have been impeded to access their

lands by a permanent surveillance system carried out by the Military Police of Pará, at the Vila Palmares post, involving the use of cameras, drones, signs, surveillance posts, and scouts serving the company. This technological surveillance system aims to control and prevent the access of quilombola families to the traditionally occupied territory areas, including access to the Acará River, where artisanal fishing traditionally guarantees food for quilombola families.

Given this egregious violation of human and territorial rights, we immediately request the authorized public bodies take measures to:

- Curb any forms of violence against communities by Agropalma and its security guards and by the Pará Military Policy;
- Take all necessary steps to understand the gravity of the situation and avoid future tragedies caused by the intensification of territorial conflicts and the risk of death faced by quilombola families;
- Guarantee basic conditions for the survival of families, including free access to the Acará River and stopping the compulsory displacement of quilombolas from their territory;
- Immediately freeze all development projects until compliance with the Free, Public and Informed Consultation protocol is reached, as determined by Convention 169 of the International Labour Organisation (ILO);
- Immediately resume the process of land regularization of the quilombola territory of Alto Rio Acará (PA) by ITERPA of the State of Pará.

Based on the aforementioned details, the ABA and its Quilombo Committee express their unyielding solidarity with the quilombola families and reiterate the need for urgent action by the relevant public authorities to apply the precepts established in the Federal Constitution of 1988 and ensure the defence of quilombola territorial rights.

Brasilia, February 14, 2022.

**Brazilian Association of Anthropology (ABA) and its Quilombos
Committee**