

PIARAÇU DECLARATION

Note – The Kayapo-organized meeting on hydroelectric dams on the Xingu River in the Brazilian Amazon was a turning point in the international campaign to stop the dams. Now, for the first time in years, the Kayapo held a tribal meeting from March 28 – April 1, 2006 to discuss the dam plans, which they categorically rejected in the Declaration of Piaraçu. Professor Terence Turner, of Cornell University, a researcher and ally of the Kayapo for several decades, was one of the few outsiders invited to attend, and he sent IRN this summary of the meeting's conclusions.

“200 representatives of 19 of the 21 communities of the Mebegokre (Kayapo) people met for five days in the village of Piaraçu. The main subject of discussion was the project of the Brazilian government to build the Belo Monte dam and four other hydroelectric dams on the Xingú River and its main tributary, the Iriri.

The participants in the meeting were unanimously opposed to the construction of these dams, alleging that they would have catastrophic effects on the ecosystem, and would flood large areas of indigenous territory. Many speakers introduced their remarks by singing their personal war-songs, and warned that if the government proceeds with the construction of Belo Monte it would bring on war with the Kayapo. They also denounced the failure of Eletronorte and President Lula da Silva to disclose the true extent of the plan, noting that they regularly present it in public as a scheme involving only the single dam of Belo Monte, whereas the project as a whole actually includes five huge dams. One point repeatedly emphasized by speakers was that Eletronorte and President Lula, by not coming to Kayapo communities and those of other regional people to explain openly the details of their plans, or allowing for the Kayapo to discuss the project in the National Congress, are in violation of national law, which requires that any development project which involves potentially damaging effects on indigenous territories should be discussed with the indigenous communities likely to be affected, and those communities should have the opportunity to discuss the project in the National Congress.

In addition to their intransigent opposition to the dams, the representatives of communities situated on the banks of the Xingú denounced the increasing pollution of the river resulting from agricultural activities, such as the massive cultivation of soy beans, and cattle ranching, in close proximity to the tributaries of the river. They demanded that the state regulate these activities to prevent the strangulation of the riverine ecosystem.

In the words of the organizer of the meeting, Megaron Txukarramãe, “We Mebegokre Kayapo are aware that the problems that threaten the lives of our communities in the Xingú Valley also threaten other peoples, both indigenous and Brazilian, who also live in the valley. The solution of these problems, and thus the effective protection of our river and our forest, forms part of a common struggle, which we share with all the peoples of the Xingú Valley. Eighteen months ago, we met together with the other indigenous peoples of the Upper, Middle and Lower Xingú in Piaraçu to forge a common front against these threats. Now, following upon the successful conclusion of the meeting of all of our own communities, we are entering upon the next stage of our struggle, contacting

organizations of national Brazilian settlers of the Lower Xingú and the Transamazonica to form an alliance of all the peoples of the Valley of the Xingú to save our river from the dams, from pollution, and all kinds of destructive development, and to promote alternative forms of production based on the productive powers of local communities using sustainable resources. We call on all the inhabitants of the Xingú Valley to join with us in a great demonstration in Altamira against the Belo Monte dam and the other dams that Eletronorte wants to build throughout our valley, and for the protection and development of our own productive powers, our cultures and communities.”

Original text in Portuguese prepared by Terence Turner, Megaron Txukarramãe, and Luis Carlos Sampaio. Translation by Terence Turner