

**LETTER FROM
THE GRAND COUNCIL OF ATY GUASU
TO THE BRAZILIAN AUTHORITIES**

Around three years ago, the families of Pyellito Kue wrote a letter telling the world that they were willing to sacrifice their own lives in order to keep alive the fight for their traditional *tekoha* (*traditional Guarani villages*). Today, we warriors, male and female, of the Guarani and Kaiowa people, guided by our *Nanderu* and *Nandecy* (*traditional healers*), and moved by the sound of our *mbaraka* (*percussion instrument*), have met with the resolute families of Pyellito again and held a grand council of Aty Guasu on February 20th and 21st.

Like Pyellito, we representatives of all the other *tekoha* in the State of Mato Grosso do Sul continue to declare that we are willing to die in the fight for the liberation of all our ancestral territories and as long as the government does not demarcate our lands we shall not back down in our *retomadas* (*retaking of indigenous lands*), nor take a single step back.

It is inadmissible for us to see and feel that the Pyellito population lives confined within 100 hectares, given that their previously demarcated territory (it is split in a weird way), as published in the official gazette, is of more than 41,000 hectares. While our people live cramped in, the exploitation of agri-business destroys the rest of the forest, kills the earth and pollutes the rivers - our sacred home.

We meditate and reflect on the situation of our lands, as we are all experiencing the same situation as Pyellito Kue. Today, some of our lands are in the hands of the President of the Republic, who will not sign the demarcation of these lands. Other lands are in the hands of the Minister of Justice who will not make a declaration. Meanwhile, both the President and the Ministry of Justice are prohibiting FUNAI (*Federal Agency for the Protection of Indigenous Peoples*) from publishing reports identifying and demarcating more than 50 of our people's

territories. This results in our people being forced to camp out on the edges of the highways near their traditional lands. Some of our people are dying there or otherwise, inside plantations. All of this because the government embraced agri-business and decided to guarantee demarcations favouring the Ruralists and the development of PEC 215. *(Proposed changes in the constitution that would block the recognition of indigenous lands.)*

In addition to the exploitation by the landowners, we are experiencing true genocide in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul. The elderly, children, women, everyone is in the line of fire of the gunmen who attack in broad daylight. It is deplorable that, faced with this desperate reality, the president of FUNAI, João Pedro Gonçalves, gives interviews to media networks and on the internet stating that there is no genocide and that our people are not dying. This fills us with pain because it is a mockery and shows great disrespect to all our fighters who have given their lives in acts of courage for our future and for the future of our children.

João Pedro, on the other hand, shows no courage as he stands silently by in the face of the further and worse disintegration that FUNAI has suffered in recent decades. We discovered, although we struggled to believe it, that in order to reduce payments and undoubtedly to maintain the benefits of agri-business, Dilma and the Minister of Justice, José Cardozo, ordered FUNAI to foot the bill.

They want to cut 40% of FUNAI's already paltry funds and to lay off 130 assistants and close 30 CTLs (*offices for the local coordination of land issues*) in Brazil. This will mean the laying off of anthropologists and people who have a fundamental role within our *tekoha*. In this way, as well as the genocide caused by bullets, this measure condemns us to suffer the institutional genocide of the abandonment our people; alongside it, we find a support organization with no structure to deal with our inhuman living conditions.

We, the Guarani and Kaiowa leaders, decided that we shall fight with all our strength against this criminal disintegration.

The government must honour the 1988 Federal Constitution, the international conventions and its commitment to our people, by strengthening FUNAI instead of dispensing with it and throwing cold water over hundreds of graves throughout Brazil. If these cuts take place, we will have to occupy Brasilia and revert the situation with blood, sweat and twigs.

As if the attacks from the rest of the government that FUNAI has suffered are not enough, João Pedro has allowed Valter Coutinho to coordinate the demarcations. We know that Coutinho continues to state that “there are no traditional Guarani lands” and that “the land studies in Mato Grosso do Sul should stop and be revised,” that “the Peguá studies should be suspended,” and that “reserves or modules should be created for the Kaiowa and Guarani, with an area of between 500 and 2000 hectares,” disrespecting our native and constitutional right to our traditions.

With this, what was always the source of our misfortune becomes a solution. In a clear policy of “*prender morto*”, (*arrest someone when dead*) Coutinho presents as a solution the very reservation system that is the root of our historic and social problems. Coutinho’s positions are no surprise. Our people have a good memory and we know his name well. During the 1990s he was responsible for the demarcation of small areas of land that now suffer from lack of space, and he also intervened directly against other demarcation processes for the Guarani populations, for example in the case of our relatives the Mbya, from the land of Morro dos Cavalos, in the State of Santa Catarina.

We do not even want to talk to Coutinho. We demand his immediate removal. We also demand that FUNAI and the government respect the demarcation of our lands based on our traditions, continue with the land studies and immediately guarantee the land regularisation process for all our *tekoha*. We also demand the immediate publication of the studies “Dourados - Amambai Pegá 1” and “Terra Indígena de Ypoí Triunfo,” because we know that these studies have been concluded and all that

prevents the demarcation from taking place is political decisions. We also denounce SESAI (*Ministry of Health*). This governmental body continues lying to our people with its representatives saying that they cannot implement health and sanitary measures in areas of land conflict. Because of this, two children died in Kurusu Amba in recent months. This also happens in education, where hundreds of children are left with no school because the state of Mato Grosso do Sul and the municipalities use the same excuse. Both bodies disregard the laws that guarantee health and education to all for humanitarian reasons, regardless of their land situation.

In relation to the Ruralists in the National Congress, some judges and ministers in the second chamber of the Supreme Federal Court along with parliamentarians linked to agri-business in Mato Grosso do Sul behave as sworn enemies of the indigenous peoples. They endeavour to change the Constitution and end our rights through CPIs (*Parliamentary Investigation Commissions*), PECs (*proposed changes to the constitution*) and the “time frame thesis” (*wherein the government will only consider lands for demarcation that have been held by indigenous peoples since October 5th 1988*). This will not result in triumph because our people, from our most elderly to our newborn children, will resist until all our lands, our lives and our ancestral culture are liberated once and for all. Not a single step back.

The Grand Council of Aty Guasu of the Guarani and Kaiowa people,
Pyellito Kue, 21st February 2016