



Statement by Minister Maria Teresa Mesquita Pessôa  
Permanent Mission of Brazil to the United Nations

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(Check against delivery)

Mr. Chair,

At the outset, let me congratulate you for your election to preside over the current Session. I would also like to congratulate the newly elected members of the Bureau and wish you all success during this Session.

All over the world, and particularly in the Americas, the historical process of discovery and colonization resulted in the confiscation of lands and the restriction of access to natural resources by indigenous peoples. In electing the right to redress as the special theme of the 11th Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, States now have the opportunity to reaffirm their commitment to the rights of indigenous peoples and give visibility to their policies regarding redress.

In Brazil's case, since the times of the Portuguese Crown, the legislation on the matter has, to a certain extent, recognized indigenous peoples' original rights over their lands, but still under the doctrine of discovery to justify colonization. After a period of attempts to assimilate indigenous peoples while liberating lands for non-indigenous occupants, the Federal Constitution of 1988 was established to reaffirm indigenous peoples' original rights to their lands, in the context of protection of human rights. It recognizes indigenous peoples' rights over their lands as fundamental to their survival, as well as their physical and cultural reproduction as distinct groups. The State, thus, no longer carries on projects and expectations that entail the assimilation of indigenous peoples, considering instead their cultural diversity as a positive and fundamental value, along with national development and the eradication of poverty.

Mr. Chair,

At the present time, around 13% of Brazil's territory is recognized as indigenous lands. 400 of those indigenous lands have already been formally declared and 300 others are now under the process of being formalized. More than 220 peoples inhabit those lands, speaking over 180 distinct languages and carrying unique lifestyles, contributing to the enrichment of our national diversity.

Brazil also respects the autonomy of dozens of isolated indigenous peoples through the protection of their lands. Specific policies aimed at the protection of the lands of isolated indigenous peoples are of utmost importance to prevent them from being affected in the 21st Century by the mistakes of Colonization. In those lands, indigenous peoples express valuable contributions to the world in terms of sustainable development. In this regard, I would like to acknowledge the report on the "Protection of Peoples in Isolation and Initial Contact in Amazonia, the Gran Chaco and eastern Paraguay", issued last February by the High Commissioner for Human Rights of the United Nation with the support of Brazil, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru and Venezuela.

In Brazil, indigenous people keep the most environmentally preserved areas while using it to their development according to traditional uses and knowledge. In this context, Brazil considers indigenous peoples as protagonists at the upcoming Rio+20 Conference.

Besides the recognition of the role of indigenous peoples and their lands to the conservation of our biodiversity and sustainable development, the current policy on the protection of indigenous lands is a policy of redress. Such policy, put into practice by the Brazilian National Indigenous Foundation (FUNAI), takes into account indigenous people's human rights and historical, social, and cultural characteristics. The demarcation and the assurance of full ownership by the indigenous peoples of their lands are indispensable measures to properly foster demographical recovery, supported by Brazil in other international "fora", of such processes as ethnic identity reaffirmation and the promotion of social rights.

By doing so, Brazil undertakes a redress policy that aims at correcting the asymmetries that stemmed from the colonization process. Despite colonization, those peoples have never lost their connection to their lands, nor have they given up on demanding their rights over them.

In this context, we recognize the Republic of Congo for referring to our national policies regarding indigenous lands and the protection of indigenous peoples.

Mr. Chair,

In a very recent decision of May 2nd, the Supreme Federal Court of Brazil confirmed the rights of the "Pataxó Hã-hã-hãe" people over the "Caramuru Paraguasu" indigenous land, in the state of Bahia. By ending a legal dispute that had lasted for almost a century, the decision by the Supreme Court legitimizes the implementation of measures that ensure full ownership of indigenous peoples over their lands, as well as access to social and reproductive rights, according to their knowledge and traditions.

Finally, I would like to invite all people here present to attend the side event organized by Brazil on the Protection of Indigenous Territories tomorrow, Wednesday, at 6:30pm in this same room.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.