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**Statement by Dr. Mércio Pereira Gomes**

**President of the National Foundation for the Indian**

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## **STATEMENT BY BRAZIL**

**Presented by**

**Mercio Pereira Gomes  
President of the National Foundation for the Indian**

Brazil is one of the five largest countries in the world with over 8.5 million square kilometers. Its population sums 180 million people that descend from peoples from all quarters of the earth. Our indigenous population sums 440.000 people with 220 distinct peoples speaking some 180 languages. That amounts to 0.24% of the whole Brazilian population.

Over the last 95 years Brazil has recognized some 600 indigenous lands. Most of those lands have already been or are in the process of being demarcated and ratified by the president of the Republic. Those lands amount to over one million square kilometers, or about 12.5% of the national territory. This is a process that all Brazilians recognize as important for the construction of their own national identity. Just in the last two years, fifty-four indigenous lands, amounting to a total area of 9.1 million hectares, have been officially ratified. One of the those lands was Raposa Serra do Sol, with 1.743.000 hectares, in the state of Roraima, the northernmost state of Brazil, the homeland of the Makuxi, Wapixana, Taurepang, Ingarikó, and Patamona peoples.

In recognizing the right of the indigenous peoples to their lands, the Government enshrines the principle of the right to the land as the core of its policies for Indigenous peoples. It was in fact due to land ratification that a substantial change in the previous dramatic decrease of indigenous population can be observed since the 1950's.

Nevertheless, several indigenous peoples are still living under very hard conditions. The average infant mortality rate of indigenous peoples is twice as high as that of the general Brazilian population, or 56 per 1000. The territorial problems faced by some of those peoples engender specific situations of food insecurity, which have recently been targeted by governmental specialized agencies through specific programmes especially conceived for their situations.

The current most pressing problem is that of addressing infant subnutrition prevalent in some indigenous villages of Mato Grosso and Mato Grosso do Sul states. Just this year, 26 children of the Kaiowá people died of causes related partially to subnutrition. To face this extremely tragic and difficult situation, the government has last April allocated the sum of R\$ 4.1 million (about 1.5 million US dollars) to the villages of Bororó, Jaguapiru, as well as other indigenous villages in Mato Grosso do Sul state. These resources will be used to provide a water-supply network, new housing, and education, and will benefit some fifty three thousand indigenous people.

The measures adopted also involve the provision of medical examinations and assistance, the establishment of a new pediatric unit, improvements in the distribution of basic food and multimix baskets, (the latter being a flour compound of vegetable leaves, seeds, eggshells, etc., manufactured at a low cost, which is used to supplement the diet of persons suffering from deficient nutrition), advice on nutrition and Vitamin A supplements.

Also in connection with the Guarani-Kaiowá Indians, mention should be made of the fact that on the 28<sup>th</sup> of March, President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva signed the decree officially recognizing de indigenous area of Nhande Ru Marangatu (Cerro Marangatu), in Mato Grosso do Sul state. This area of 9.3 thousand hectares has long been claimed by the Guarani Kaiowá Nhandeva. Nearly 600 Guarani were already living in the area, but were at risk of eviction under an order specifying they must leave by the 31<sup>st</sup> of March. Now that the land has been officially recognized as theirs, they may remain in the area, where they had already established corn and cassava fields.

Another dramatic situation occurred in the Xavante villages located in the municipal districts of Barra do Garças, Campinápolis, Água Boa, Paranatinga and Nova Xavantina. There the infant mortality rate had reached the high number of 110 per 1.000. Measures taken included the hiring of medical personnel and community agents to help identifying children at risk of nutritional deficiencies or suffering from illnesses associated with malnutrition (diarrhea, dehydration, anemias, etc). The children being treated in the specialized hospitals of the neighboring municipalities are seen daily by a medical team from the National Health Foundation (FUNASA) and the regional municipal health system.

One example of the search for improving the quality of life of the indigenous population of Brazil is to be found in the programmes developed by an indigenist team hired and funded by Eletronorte, a state electric company, in association with the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI). The programmes were originally created to redress and compensate the indigenous population whose portions of their territories were flooded as a result of the construction of two hydro-electric power plants. The first programme was implemented in 1988, in the state of Amazonas, where the lake formed by the building of the Balbina hydro-electric power plant led to the flooding of some 30.000 hectares of the Waimiri Atroari Indigenous Land. With a population of 374 persons, the tribe was facing extinction. The National Indigenous Foundation (FUNAI) provided the demarcation of the Waimiri Atroari territory, which amounts to 2.700.000 hectares, one of the largest in the country. The programme furthered ensured that they received medical and educational assistance of excellent quality. Twelve basic health centres were established in their villages and a special bilingual education program mostly taught and administered by the Indigenous themselves was implemented. The Waimiri Atroari are also raising wild animals and developing agricultural livestock and fish farming. As of April 2005, the Waimiri Atroari number 1.066 persons, have expanded in 16 villages that control the whole of their territory, maintain their culture with vigor and dedication, and are growing at a 5.5% annual rate of population growth, four times higher than the national rate.

A second example of equal redress caused by a development programme is that of Awaete Parakanã Indigenous people. Their territory had 38,700 hectares flooded by the lake formed by the Tucuruí hydro-electric power plant in the state of Pará. As a result of the help afforded by a programme established by Funai and Eletronorte, the Awaete Parakana are maintaining a significant rate of population growth, (the tribe now numbers 643 persons from less than 200 in 1987), producing their own food and preserving their culture. Moreover, their territory was compensated by an equal portion of land and amounts to some 350,000 hectares.

With regard to education, 150.000 Indigenous children are enrolled at primary and secondary schools in their villages or in nearby municipal districts. A further 2.000 young people are in higher education institutions, a number that is on the increase as a

result of the quota policy and the University for All Programme (ProUni), created in 2004 by the Ministry of Education. In the first stage of the programme, 41.5% of the 112.000 scholarships were especially allocated to students of African descent and indigenous.

Brazil is fully committed with the MDG's, and this commitment is translated into real actions, both in international fora and at the national level. In regard to the goal of combating poverty and eradicating hunger, we are glad to recall that more than 120 countries now support the Declaration of the Meeting of World Leaders Against Hunger and Poverty, issued by initiative of President Lula, together with the President of France, the President of Chile, the President of the Government of Spain. Only through global cooperation it will be possible to reach the Millennium Development Goals.

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