

## Brazil: An Explosive Situation Against Dams

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There has been ongoing controversy and violence since the beginning of the construction of the Barra Grande Dam, located on the Pelotas River between Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina in the south of Brazil.

On December 7, approximately 800 families affected by the construction of the dam mobilized in a protest march in Barra Grande. These families have been living in encampments for more than 50 days to protest the deforestation of the area and the lack of indemnity for those who lost their land.

Fifteen hundred small family farmers have been expelled from their land and, according to Mauro Brend, director of MAB (Movement of Those Displaced by Dams), the farmers will not permit further construction of these dams while there are no guarantees for their resettlement.

The license for the construction of the dam was fraudulently obtained as the Environmental Impact Study did not acknowledge the existence of 6,000 hectares of primary Atlantic forest, as well as a rich reserve for Brazilian pines in danger of extinction.

The forest, which covers 2/3 of the future dam reservoir, was described as "weeds" by Engevix, the company that did the study.

The federal government (Minister of Energy and Environment, Secretary General) has met with members of MAB, the movement representing the populations affected by the construction of dams in the south of Brazil.

According to groups linked to the farmers, BAESA, the firm responsible for the Barra Grande dam, has been completely insensitive to the needs of the population.

The groups that make up BAESA (Alcoa, a U.S. firm; Camargo Corrêa; Banco Bradesco; and Votarantin;) did not show up for the two meetings with MAB and the Federal Government to negotiate a solution.

This has revolted the affected population and according to Eloir Vieira Soares, leader of MAB, "BAESA does not seem to be worried about the situation of extreme conflict that is occurring in the area of the dam construction."

These conflicts were aggravated after the deforesting of the principal reserve of pine trees in Barra Grande as well as the death of workers cutting the timber in the region.

According to Soares, there is a climate of extreme tension: "One more worker died because of the actions of large construction companies of dams. This is not an isolated incident but reflects the position of the company concerned only with profits while putting people's lives at risk".

MAB is demanding that all of the social and environmental problems be resolved before further construction of the dam.

Other main issues of the conflict are: The inclusion of 285 more displaced families in the list of those to receive benefits; Agriculture credits to permit the farmers to gather their harvest; electric energy for 600 families in the area with a discount for poor families that have been affected by the dam.

MAB also wants actions to resolve the problems of transportation and construction that are a result of the dam construction and protection for the Brazilian pine trees and Atlantic forest in danger of extinction;

They also require that the timber that is removed from the area be donated by BAESA to build houses for the low-income population in the area besides asking for the acquisition of 500 hectares of land in the area to be used as a cooperative for the farmers.

MAB still wishes total execution of the terms of the Environmental Accord that was signed by BAESA and the Federal Government, with participation of the civil society.

They also call for the creation of effective legislation that will prohibit what they call "new social and environmental crimes" from being committed.

In November, federal prosecutor, Nazareno Wolff, ruled that BAESA must negotiate an accord with the populations affected in the area.

According to him, the license to operate the power plants will not be issued until all of the social problems have been resolved.

Érico da Fonseca, MAB leader, in commenting on the posture of BAESA, states, "It is difficult to believe that the farmers had to arrive at this level of conflict in order for BAESA to try to find a solution to the problems that they themselves created".

Barra Grande is just one of many areas in the south of Brazil that is affected by the construction of dams for power plants. Hundreds of families have been displaced in Campos Novos, Foz do Chapecó, and at the basin of the Uruguai River.

According to Marco Antonio Trierweiler, of the national directory of MAB, the construction of these dams is being conducted by a small number of large national and multinational businesses that form specific consortiums for each work.

"For each dam, Votarantim, Bradesco, Camargo Corrêa and the multinationals Alcoa and Tractebel camouflage themselves differently so that they can avoid agreements already prepared by populations who have struggled in the past with displacement", states Trierweiler.

He emphasizes that "the Federal Government needs to be the negotiator between the affected population and the businesses. It is not possible that large economic groups and multinationals do what they want in these regions and that there exists no government or judicial organ to solve the social problems that these groups have created".

MAB - Movimento dos Atingidos por Barragens  
[www.mabnacional.org.br](http://www.mabnacional.org.br)