

## Lula Became Hostage of the Rich, Says Brazilian Bishop

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Brazilian Bishop Dom Luiz Flávio Cappio received recently the Kant World Citizen Award from the Kant Foundation in Germany. The award, given every two years to persons who are acknowledged human rights defenders, is the second international recognition given to the bishop in recognition of his work against the redirecting of the São Francisco River.

At the occasion of the prize the activist bishop gave the following interview:

You came to Germany to receive the World Citizen Award. Last year, you were given an award from an organization based in Belgium. Do you believe that it is possible to make the transposition of the São Francisco an international campaign?

Since the time we did the two fasts, this campaign already became known throughout the world. We have received tremendous solidarity from many countries. These awards are evidence of this. Pax Christi, which is present in 54 countries, and the Kant Foundation here in Germany, have themselves taken up this cause in defense of the poorest people of the Brazilian Northeast.

A confrere of yours here in Germany said that your two fasts had at least two practical results: first, the fasts stripped off the mask of a so-called popular government when a fork in the road was placed before the government and they opted for the other path; and second, the fasts made the CNBB (Conference of Brazilian Bishops) return to their agenda of a preferential option for the poor. What else do you see as effects of the fasts?

Yes, besides these two aspects, I see a growing consciousness of the river folk, of the Brazilian nation, and of the world regarding the problem which was once so rarely discussed. Another great victory was the unification of all of those who struggled for this cause. Suddenly we saw indigenous, people from quilombos, academics, politicians all together, aligning themselves with this spirit of struggle, of the churches, of the movements.

Everything seems to indicate that President Lula will not be able to declare by the end of his presidency that he completed the transposition. Do you really believe that he will arrive at the end of his presidency without the work being completed?

I don't believe this project will be completed. No way do I believe it. I always compare the transposition project to a computer full of viruses. When you have an infected computer, eventually it comes to a moment when it just stops. This project is so full of irregularities that suddenly it is going to freeze up. There is no way it can move forward. I don't believe it will reach the end. And it won't satisfy Lula's vanity.

Do you still expect something from the Lula government?

Well, I can't say that I hope for anything. I can say that I did hope, I used to hope. For this reason I struggled, I sweated so that the government would return to the best interests of the people. And suddenly, we realized that the Lula government became hostage of the rich, of big transnational projects. I was disappointed. Today, I don't hope for anything more from the government, and I don't see a time of change in the government. I wish it to be better.

Gandhi did nine fasts. Have you completely ruled out the possibility of having one more fast?

I have not the slightest pretense of comparing myself to Gandhi. But I think the fast has already achieved its objective. It has already given a shout, and those who should hear have already heard. I think the message has been sent.

Brasil de Fato