

Blacks Denounce Brazil for Racism at the OAS

Contributed by Graziela Sant'Anna
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There are more than 90 complaints against Brazil in the Human Rights Commission of the Organization of American States (OAS), and one of them concerns collective racial discrimination allegedly suffered by the "quilombola" (runaway slaves and their descendants) communities of Alcântara, in the Northeast Brazilian state of Maranhão.

According to the complaint, the rights of the "quilombolas" of Alcântara have been disrespected since 1980, when the Aerospace Launch Center was created. Hundreds of families were removed from their lands and transferred to farming settlements, inducing culture shock.

"The moment the project got underway, they were able to remove us, due to our own lack of organization," said Ivo Fonseca Silva, one of the coordinators of the Association of Rural Black Quilombola Communities of Maranhão.

The government has since created an Inter-Ministerial Work Group to offer solutions that respect the rights of the region's "quilombola" citizens, in case the aerospace base is ever expanded.

Descendants of ex-slaves, community members only began to receive government policy benefits in 2003, with the publication of Decree 4887, which assures these communities possession of the land and access to health, education, and sanitation.

For Andressa Caldas, legal director of the non-governmental organization, Global Justice, which filed the Alcântara case with the OAS, even though they have an ancestral right to the land and Brazil's laws are progressive, "quilombolas" are not recognized as owners.

Ivo Fonseca Silva said that they expect that the Alcântara Action Plan will be ready by June and that the government will determine what will happen to the community.

Translation: David Silberstein
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