

Former Brazilian Slaves Win One in Court

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A ray of hope for quilombos broke through the clouds this month on a much sought-after pristine beach and rainforest in the state of Sao Paulo, Brazil.

The area in dispute is called Cacandoca, a term believed to mean "the forest of the Guinea Bissau."

It is the property of a quilombo, a term which refers to a community of descendants of runaway slaves dating back to the 1800's.

The community claims that in 1881 José Antunes de Sá, who is said to have had an affair with a slave midwife named Tomazia, granted title of the land to the community on his deathbed.

However, a real estate company, Urbanizadora Continental, claimed that they had bought 210 hectares of the land in 1974. This same company owns luxury beach condominiums adjacent to the land.

Earlier, a local judge had ruled in favor of Urbanizadora Continental, but various entities and organs of the state entered a request to nullify the decision. The Justice Tribunal of São Paulo did exactly that.

At the same time INCRA, the state's land authority, officially recognized the area as quilombo territory.

"I hope that the resolution of this dispute be an opening for other quilombos in Brazil, and that quilombo territory never be treated as common land," said quilombo leader Antônio dos Santos.

Of the 2,228 quilombos in Brazil, only 70 have official title to their lands.

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