

Brazilian Bishop Decides to Starve to Death Over River Transposition

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With the aim of stopping the São Francisco River transposition project, the Catholic bishop of Barra, in the northeastern Brazilian state of Bahia, Luiz Flávio Cappio, 59, has decided not to eat until the Federal Government gives up on the project.

The hunger strike began on September 26 in a small chapel in the Municipality of Cabrobó, state of Pernambuco. This transposition will directly affect five indigenous peoples that live in the states of Bahia and Pernambuco, along with the majority of their riverine populations.

In a letter entitled "A Life for Life," bishop Luiz announced that he would give up his life for the life of the river and asks for his decision to be respected. In another letter, sent to President Lula, bishop Cappio, who is a Franciscan friar, asks the government not to start the project due to the countless "political, environmental, economic and legal issues raised by society."

The president of CNBB, Cardinal Geraldo Majella, agreed with the bishop of Barra. "Society has not been sufficiently informed and cannot take part in the decisions. We consider the revitalization of the river to be urgent, which is also the desire of Dom Luiz Cápio. Transposition is not so simple. There is a lot to explain to and discuss with society."

Bishop Cappio rejected Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's appeal that he stop his hunger strike and agree on discussing the river transposition project.

The bishop, who hasn't eaten for 9 days and who only drinks water from the São Francisco river, has reaffirmed his decision to keep his strike and prayers until the government gives up its project.

On Saturday, Lula had sent bishop Cappio a letter stating, "I want to propose a step still not taken: that you give us the chance for a new dialog and that we talk it over, as it is usual for democratic people before they take extreme actions."

In response to the President, the bishop wrote back in his own handwriting: "I sustain my decision of keeping my fast and prayers until I get in my hands the document signed by you revoking and forgetting the current transposition project."

The government's plans call for diverting the São Francisco river to four arid states benefiting 12 million people, but critics say that rich landowners will be the ones who'll get the most benefits.

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