

Brazilian Activists Say State Assistencialism Is Not Enough to Save Indians

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In response to the accusations made by the Indianist Missionary Council (Cimi) to the UN rapporteur, Funai presented data indicating that child mortality rates amongst the Guarani-Kaiowá people in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul are falling.

"This year, the rate is 35.9 deaths for each 1,000 children born alive, which represents a drop of 51,4% in the mortality registered before the age of one as compared to 2004, when the rate was 69,7 for each 1,000 children born alive," the agency reported.

The drop in the mortality rate constitutes an important fact. However, Cimi feels that it is its obligation to bring up for public discussions certain aspects of the public policies which have been adopted in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul and their possible consequences.

The distribution of food and vitamins is an important measure to solve emergency problems faced by children and adults who are members of the Guarani people.

However, according to the Cimi, Funai has not defined or articulated structuring measures allowing the indigenous people to resume their agricultural activities.

Allowing this would imply the recognition of their traditional lands and intensive environmental recovery actions in large portions of those lands, which have been devastated by livestock activities and, more recently, by large-scale soybean plantations.

During their last Aty Guasu (large traditional assembly of the Guarani people), the Guarani listed about 200 Tekohá (traditional territories) in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul and protested when they heard that Funai would not be setting up working groups to identify and legalize their lands before July 2006.

Only the official demarcation of the bounds of their lands will ensure the survival of the Guarani and enable them not to depend on the distribution of food by public authorities.

Although they are necessary initially, public policies cannot be restricted to actions aimed at reducing hunger without addressing its fundamental causes, or else indigenous people may once again face high malnutrition and mortality rates if these policies are changed.

Cimi – Indianist Missionary Council – www.cimi.org.br