

## Brazil Has Over 2000 Former Slaves Communities Barely Surviving

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The legalization of land occupied by "quilombola" communities [communities comprising the offspring of runaway slaves] in Brazil will be a Brazilian federal government priority in 2006.

"Land is the prime factor in the constitution of other government policies and the guarantee of full citizenship for these communities," claims Minister Matilde Ribeiro, head of Brazil's Special Secretariat of Policies for the Promotion of Racial Equality (Seppir).

270 processes of legalization are currently underway. There are more than 2,250 "quilombos" scattered throughout the regions of Brazil, with populations ranging from 500 to 4 thousand inhabitants.

The "quilombola" population lives practically isolated from the cities, most of them barely getting by. "There is nearly a total absence of government policies; they lack schools, health posts, roads linking them to the cities, potable water, and electricity," the Minister emphasizes. "That is why we put together the Brazil Quilombola program," she explains.

The program, also called the Citizenship Package, involves coordinated actions by 21 federal government organs, under the supervision of the Seppir.

The Ministry of Mines and Energy participates through the Light for All program; the Ministry of Cities, through the construction of community housing; the Ministry of Social Development and Hunger Alleviation, through the Family Grant program; the Ministry of Health, through the Family Health program; the Ministry of Education, through the Youth and Adult Literacy program; and, among other organs, the National Health Foundation (Funasa), through investments in infrastructure and sanitation.

The mapping of the needs of each community is done by associations that function in the "quilombos" and present demands to the federal government, the Minister explains.

"While we proceed with property legalization, we have a commitment to expand our social actions to the extent in which we identify the needs of the communities," she underscores.

According to the Minister, in some communities there is a need to give greater encouragement to literacy training. In others, income generation, and so on.

Certain activities, however, are applicable to all communities. That is the case with the Light for All, Family Grant, and Family Health programs, which, according to the minister, have as their goal serving the needs of 100% of the "quilombola" communities by 2007.

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