

Quilombo Community in Brazil Gets Deed to their Land

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The 61 families that comprise the Conceição do Macacoari "quilombola" community (formed by descendants of runaway slaves), located 100 kilometers from the capital of Amapá, Macapá, will become owners of the 9.3 thousand hectares the community has occupied for around 200 years.

Saturday, January 7, the community will be presented with a deed in which the National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform (INCRA) recognizes its existence.

"The land does not belong to the federal government, it belongs to the community, but it can't be bought and sold," explains the coordinator of the Ministry of Agrarian Development's Program for the Promotion of Gender, Race, and Ethnic Equality, Andréa Butto.

An INCRA decree published this week in the Federal Register acknowledges that the area, on the left bank of the Macacoari River, belongs to the descendants of runaway slaves who fled from the site where the São José Fort was being constructed in Macapá, on the banks of the Amazon River, in the 18th century.

The families basically subsist on small-scale cattle-raising, fishing, agriculture, and breeding small animals. Butto stresses that possession of the deed should improve the inhabitants' living conditions.

"Access to services, infrastructure, and government policies becomes a priority once an area receives a deed," she says.

"The Brazil Quilombola program is designed to reach all quilombola communities, but especially the ones that have received deeds, so that they not only possess legal rights and guarantees over their territories but can in fact enjoy and ensure the use of these lands. Thus, the need for investments, beyond the guarantee of land," she added.

According to Butto, the families will now be eligible, for example, to participate in Ministry of Agrarian Development programs and activities in the areas of technical assistance and rural extension.

The coordinator points out that the richness of the region's soil, vegetation, and climate is "very favorable to agricultural pursuits," attracting people interested in buying the land. She said that this situation will tend to change now that INCRA has recognized the community.

This is so, according to Butto, because the land can no longer be sold. "The area was coveted for its soil conditions, but community ownership rules out any possible transfer," she points out.

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