

Brazilian Justice Acquits Man Sentenced for 1988 Massacre of Indians

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Brazil's federal court of appeals acquitted the timber mill owner Oscar de Almeida Castelo Branco, who had been sentenced in 2001 as the person who hired gunmen to carry out the genocide of the Tikuna indigenous people in the state of Amazonas in 1988.

The sentence of five other convicts of the genocide was reduced from 15-25 years to 12 years in prison and the reduction was unanimously extended to the other defendants who did not appeal against their sentence or gave up their appeals.

The decision was made, October 27, by the 3rd Panel of Judges of the Regional Federal Court (TRF) of the 1st Region, which is responsible for the state of Amazonas.

The massacre of the Tikuna people, also known as the Helmet Massacre, took place in March 1988 in the municipality of Benjamin Constant, in the Alto Solimões region, in a remote area in the state of Amazonas.

On that occasion, four people died on the spot, nineteen were wounded, and ten disappeared in the Solimões river.

Funai, the National Foundation for the Indian, had begun to demarcate the Tikuna land, giving rise to reactions from local squatters.

The indigenous people were gathered in an assembly and were unarmed when they were attacked.

The crime was dealt with as a homicide up to 1994, when an appeal filed by the Federal Prosecution Service led it to be judged as a genocide since then.

Thirteen years after the massacre, which took place on 18 May 2001, Oscar Castelo Branco was convicted as the person who hired gunmen to carry out the crime by the First Federal Court in Manaus through a sentence issued by judge Jaíza Maria Pinto Fraxe.

Castelo Branco had been in prison since 1999. There were 14 other defendants, 13 of whom were sentenced to 15-25 years in prison.

The massacre of the Tikuna was the second case in connection with which people were convicted of genocide in Brazil.

According to the coordinator of the North 1 regional office of Cimi (Conselho Indigenista Missionário - Indianist Missionary Council), Francisco Loebens, "the provocation and threats, which the Tikuna indigenous people in the Alto Solimões region continued to suffer even after the massacre, will increase.

"This decision of the TRF is a step towards impunity and brought a feeling of uneasiness to indigenous peoples."

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