

Brazil's Indianist Missionary Council Keeps Its Leader

Contributed by Newsroom
Wednesday, 22 August 2007

The missionaries gathered at the 17th Assembly of the Indianist Missionary Council (Cimi), in Brazil, elected Don Erwin Kräutler president of the entity. The bishop of the Prelacy of Xingu, in the Brazilian North, had been holding this position since November 2006, when he was elected president on an extraordinary basis to complete the term of the then president Don Franco Masserdotti, who died in September 2006.

The missionary Roberto Liebgott was elected vice president and Édén Magalhães was reelected executive secretary of the entity. The Assembly defined priorities for Cimi's actions over the next two years. Besides appointing the new board of directors of the entity, challenges and alternatives for indigenous economies were discussed during the meeting.

The experiences presented by the Rikbaktsa, Xukuru, Tupinikim and Kassupá peoples show that territorial control is an indispensable element for their survival.

The encounter concluded that participation of indigenous communities in future plans for the group - beyond isolated livelihood projects - is key to ensuring their economic autonomy and this autonomy to define future paths to be followed does not mean that indigenous economies are disconnected from the domestic economy.

Anthropologist Alfredo Wagner, one of the panelists, reaffirmed that economics and territorial issues are directly linked: it is necessary to have control over natural resources for autonomy to be ensured.

Wagner emphasized that the term territory refers to something more comprehensive than a geographical area. Its notion is linked to the physical and cultural reproduction of a community. Indigenous territories are constantly threatened by large infrastructure projects, such as gas pipeline and power plants, and by laws that facilitate access to natural resources (mining activities).

Autonomy in economic relation is also threatened when indigenous people need to adopt prevailing standards, such as, for example, that of assigning the authorship of a project to an individual, rather than to a group as a whole.

A panel discussed the challenges for people living in rural areas in Latin America. Brakes Sérgio, from the international peasant organization Via Campesina, pointed out that small and medium-sized farmers, even when they own the land they are in, produce in a standardized way for food enterprises and, for that reason, they lose their autonomy in the production process.

On the 31st, the CNBB (National Conference of Brazilian Bishops) Secretary, Don Dimas, went to the Assembly to salute

the missionaries.

He recalled with satisfaction that during the 5th Conference of the Latin American Episcopate (CELAM), held in May 2006, the indigenous issue was well represented by bishops from Mexico, Bolivia and other countries dealing with this issue.

Cimi