

## Brazilian Bishops Urge Lula to Reconsider River Transposition

Contributed by Newsroom  
Sunday, 26 August 2007

The vice president of Brazil, José Alencar, and the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil (CNBB) took on the commitment to ask Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva to resume the dialogue on the São Francisco river transposition project. On August 22, they received members of the Caravan Against the Transposition of the São Francisco River, who were in Brasília, for a meeting.

From August 20 to September 1st, a group of specialists in the São Francisco river and in the semi-arid region (scientists, jurists, community leaders, among others) will be traveling to 11 Brazilian capital cities to sensitize rulers and populations on the threats posed by the São Francisco river transposition project.

The Caravan in defense of the São Francisco River and of the Semi-Arid Region intends to challenge the consensus created by a marketing campaign of the Federal Government around the project.

"The government says that those who are against the transposition project are denying water to northeastern brothers and sisters, which is not true," explains Rubem Siqueira, from the Land Pastoral Commission.

According to the Caravan's members, the transposition is not an appropriate solution from the economic, technical, social, and environmental points of view. It would be impossible to distribute the pumped water to a scattered population - the one which suffers the effects of droughts most.

Because it consumes a lot of energy, the water made available by the transposition of the São Francisco river will imply a very high cost for consumers or it will have to be subsidized forever by the Federal Government.

The group also warns that fundamental issues, such as a strategy for the sustainable development of the Brazilian semiarid region and the recovery of watersheds, are treated by the Federal Government as compensatory or co-opting measures.

"I don't think the government is still discussing the transposition. Its position is that it is simply a project that should be implemented," evaluated Rubem after meeting the vice president.

"He was touched with the diversity and seriousness of people. We did not expect to change his position, but he pledged to speak with the president to resume the discussions from the technical and social point of view," he added.

At the CNBB, the Caravan was received by the archbishops Geraldo Lyrio Rocks and Luiz Soares Vieira and by the bishop Dimas Lara Barbosa, who are the president, vice president and secretary general of the entity, respectively.

At the end of the hearing, Dom Geraldo said that more dialogue is needed on the project. "A project of such magnitude, with so many implications, should not be implemented before all affected people are truly heard," he said.

The CNBB will submit a document to president Lula asking for more dialogue on the transposition of the São Francisco river. During the meeting with the Caravan, Dom Geraldo highlighted that the State should ensure the access of the population to quality water. The entity also recalled that both the life and lands of people living in the region should be respected.

### Land Reoccupations

Several indigenous peoples can be affected by the transposition, including the Truká and Tumbalalá peoples, who reoccupied part of their territories located in an area threatened by the project in the state of Bahia in July. About 400 Truká and 200 Tumbalalá remain in the reoccupied areas. They are pressing the Federal Government to complete the procedures for identifying and demarcating their lands.

According to the law, indigenous peoples must be consulted when a project planned to be carried out affects them. In the case of the transposition, this did not happen.