

Brazilian Catholic Bishop Resumes Hunger Strike and Accuses Lula of Betrayal

Contributed by Newsroom
Friday, 30 November 2007

Brazilian catholic bishop Dom Luiz Flávio Cappio of the Barra diocese, state of Bahia, re-started to fast in protest against the São Francisco river transposition project. In a letter sent to President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, he stressed that he will only stop fasting when the projects are suspended.

Cappio, who is on his third day of fasting today, also affirms in the letter that the president misled him and all society, since he did not honor the commitment he assumed in October 2005.

On that occasion, Dom Cappio interrupted his eleven-day hunger strike after president Lula pledged to suspend the transposition project and to begin a broad dialogue on the project with society at large.

"For two years we tried to make the terms of the agreement feasible, but the government failed to do what we had agreed," said the bishop.

He stressed that the transposition project will not meet the needs of poor people, as Lula has been announcing. "If the objective was to assist poor people, the government would have concluded other projects in the northeast region that would have truly benefited the population. There are large economic interests involved in this project, and its real objective is not to help the people," he concluded.

In the "Letter to the people of the northeast region" released November 29, Cappio recalls that there are 70,000 ponds in the semi-arid region with a 36-billion-cubic-meter capacity, but there are no canals to transport this water to those who need it. He stressed that taking water from the São Francisco river will result in charging for water use in the northeast region.

In the letter, he also affirms that "common people, mainly those living in cities, are those who will subsidize the use of the water for economic purposes, such as for irrigating expensive fruits and for shrimp cultivation and steel production projects for export purposes."

Dom Luiz says that the 530 projects proposed by the National Water Agency (ANA) in its Atlas of the Northeast Region, which would supply water to 1,300 municipalities in the region at a cost of 3.6 billion reais (US\$ 1,980 billion), just about half of the 6.6 billion reais (US\$ 3.6 billion) to be allocated to the transposition project).

According to the prelate, they are the best alternative for the population of the semi-arid region, as well as the experiences of the Semi-arid Region Network and of project such as the One Million Cisterns project.

Dom Cappio is staying at the São Francisco Chapel in the municipality of Sobradinho, in Bahia state, on the banks of the São Francisco river, whose waters have been his only source of food in the past three days.

Every day, people from Sobradinho, Juazeiro, Petrolina, Cabrobó, Recife, Feira de Santana, Sergipe, Salvador, and other localities visit him to support his fasting.

Different organizations and movements are also supporting the catholic church dignitary, among which MAB (Movement of Dam-Affected People), MPA (Small farmers' Movement), MST (Landless Movement), CPT (Pastoral Land Commission), Cimi (Indianist Missionary Council) and the Brazilian Caritas.

These displays of solidarity have touched him, Dom Cappio says, such as the one from Dom Pedro Casaldaglia, from the prelacy of São Felix do Araguaia, who spoke to him on the telephone.

Priests from the region and the bishop of the Diocese of Juazeiro, Bahia state, Dom José Geraldo, are constantly in touch with him. At least four religious people have abstained from eating for from one to two days in support of Dom Cappio.

Cimi