

## Despite Court Victory Brazil's Catholic Bishop Keeps Hunger Strike For 16th Day

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Despite a preliminary injunction stopping the São Francisco river transposition project, the Catholic bishop of the Barra diocese, in the Brazilian northeastern state of Bahia, Dom Luiz Cappio, is keeping his hunger strike alive. Cappio has been fasting since November 27 to call attention to the government plan to divert the river, something he sees as unconscionable.

The prelate said that he was happy to hear about the judicial order, but added that he wanted to act cautiously before halting his hunger strike. He is particularly worried with the fact that the Brazilian Army has kept its men protecting the river.

"The news of the preliminary order brought us much joy and it filled us with hope, but we still need to see how the government is going to act in view of this preliminary injunction." He described himself as "weakened, although strong psychologically."

Brazilian president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva will be receiving today in the Planalto Palace, in Brazilian capital Brasília, the president of the National Conference of the Bishops of Brazil (CNBB), Geraldo Lyrio Rocha, and the entity's general secretary, Dimas Lara Barbosa.

The meeting was requested by CNBB to deal with the government's response to the bishop's martyrdom act. This is the second time Dom Cappio goes on a hunger strike in defense of the São Francisco. The first time he stopped the fasting after getting assurances from Lula that the project would be widely discussed. He says the president betrayed him.

During these 16 days of fasting, different organizations and people from all over Brazil and from abroad have been expressing their support to the bishop' struggle through letters, demonstrations, and even by fasting themselves.

On December 4, over 4,000 people participated in a demonstration in the municipality of Sobradinho, state of Bahia, where the bishop has been living since he began to fast. On the next day, over 1,000 people closed a bridge on the São Francisco river, on the BR-242 roadway.

In support to Dom Cappio, the Shout of the Excluded staged a demonstration on December 6 at the Praça da Sé (Sé square), in the city of São Paulo, when many people abstained from eating during the whole day.

In the city of Belo Horizonte, students and religious people also began to fast for an undetermined time in protest against the transposition project. Religious people are taking turns in fasting for from one or two days together with Dom Cappio.

Different organizations expressed their support to Dom Cappio, amongst which the Articulation of Indigenous Peoples from the Northeast region, Minas Gerais and Espírito Santo (Apoimne). Twenty indigenous peoples of the region will be directly and indirectly affected by the transposition project.

A note recalls that the government "should ensure a process of prior consultations with the indigenous peoples who will be impacted by the project." In its note, the National Council of Christian Churches of Brazil stressed that "this extreme act of Dom Frei Luiz is not just a political act and involves symbolic and religious dimensions."

All these demonstrations in support of Dom Cappio have been strengthening him, he told reporters. On December 5 he began to take doses of sugar/salt oral rehydration solution.

A comparison among projects specifically designed for the region reveals that alternatives to the transposition project could assist more people at a lower cost.

According to the Ministry for Integration, the transposition project will benefit 12 million people in 397 municipalities in 4 states at a cost of 6.6 billion Brazilian reais (US\$ 3.75 billion). 70% of the water will be destined for irrigation, 26% for urban-industrial supply, and 4% to scattered rural populations.

The projects proposed by the Atlas of the Northeast Region (disseminated by the National Water Agency), which are associated to a project for impounding rain water, can benefit up to 44 million people in 1,356 municipalities in 10 states at a cost of 3.6 billion reais (US\$ 2.05 billion) These projects are mainly aimed at providing water to urban and rural populations for human use.