

Brazil Bishop Calls River Transposition Project Antiethic

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During a hearing held last week at the Brazilian Senate on the São Francisco river transposition project, House representative **Ciro Gomes**, from Ceará state's Brazilian Socialist Party, recognized, while arguing in favor of the transposition project, that it will not benefit populations scattered throughout Brazil's semiarid region.

Dom Luiz Cappio, bishop of Barra, in the Bahia state, and the minister of the National Integration, **Geddel Vieira Lima**, amongst others, attended the hearing.

Dom Cappio, who twice went on a hunger strike to protest against the project, stressed that the transposition project will benefit large northeastern farmers to the detriment of the population in remote rural areas who has no access to water.

He compared the transposition project to other alternatives proposed for the region, such as to projects contemplated in the Northeast Atlas developed by the National Water Agency, which were proposed by the federal administration itself.

While the transposition project is expected to benefit 12 million people in 4 states, the projects contemplated in the Atlas can benefit up to 34 million people in 10 states. He highlighted that the transposition project was developed for economic purposes, for producing fruits for export and for breeding shrimps under controlled conditions.

The bishop reaffirmed that the government has been hiding facts about the transposition project. "The transposition project is antiethic, because it takes advantage of the good faith of people. Ensuring the well-being of the population should be its main target, and if this was true we would be supporting it," the bishop stressed.

Representative **Gomes** defended the implementation of the transposition project, highlighting that the river can support the 26m³-second discharge contemplated in the project without suffering serious consequences.

On the other hand, he recognized that the "glass of water for those who are thirsty motto is just nonsense talk. The transposition project is not a panacea for the Northeast or anything of that kind, but it will help to ensure a safer water supply for humans and for the animals of 12 million people who live in areas covered by the transposition project," he said.

"They say 12 million people because they included in their estimate the population of medium-size and large cities such as Fortaleza, Mossoró and João Pessoa, which are not facing serious drought-related problems. When they talk about water supply security, it means that water will be piped to where it is already concentrated," argued **Luciano Silveira**, from the coordinating board of the Semiarid Region Articulation (ASA), recalling that, for the first time, those who support the transposition project recognized that the population of the semi-arid region will continue to be excluded.

After about five hours of discussions, the participants saw that a new meeting should be held at the Senate to provide more clarifications about the project. In addition, a committee made up of senators will visit the San Francisco river area in July.

"This was a day of citizenship rights. It is a shame that it only happened after the project began to be implemented," Dom Cappio said as he thanked those attending the meeting for the opportunity to participate in it. In 2005, after the catholic bishop fasted for the first time to protest against the transposition project, Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva pledged to discuss the transposition project before actually implementing it.