



*Office of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation
Congregation of Notre Dame --- Visitation Province
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His Excellency Valdemar Carneiro Leão
Ambassador of Brazil to Canada
450 Wilbrod Street
Ottawa, Ontario
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December 11, 2007

Excellency,

Visitation Province was founded in 2001, bringing together over 300 English-speaking Canadian sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame (CND). Through our JPIC Office we further our ministry in social justice, peace and the protection of the entire Earth Community. At the level of the Congregation, our sisters work in nine countries throughout the world, including several in Latin America.

It has come to our attention that your government is developing a massive water diversion project on the São Francisco River, and that this project is opposed by many people and organizations of the region. We write to ask that you inform the appropriate Brazilian authorities of our deep concern that the project is moving forward without appropriate dialogue with, much less the consent of, the very people whose livelihoods will be most affected.

The São Francisco River diversion project is a mammoth undertaking that could include nine pumping stations, canals that are hundreds of kilometers in length, twenty-seven aqueducts, eight tunnels, thirty-five water reservoirs and two hydroelectric plants. But who will benefit? A World Bank study has argued against granting a loan on the basis that this huge project promises negligible effects on poverty reduction. Indigenous peoples of the Truká, Tingui-Botó, Pankararu, Kiriri, Atikum and Tuxá communities, *quilombola* communities, communities of small farmers and fishers, environmental groups and faith

communities have all variously expressed opposition to the project. Yet, the Army has recently been ordered in to begin development work.

It is worrisome that government assurances given to the Church and regional communities in 2005 (which halted development for a time) have now been ignored. We are aware that Dom Luiz Flavio Cappio ofm, bishop of the diocese of Barra in Bahia State, has been on a hunger strike since November 27th, 2007, in order to draw international attention to this problem. We support the bishop's prophetic and prayerful defense of his people and the environment, but are concerned for his health and well-being. We request that the Brazilian government immediately begin dialogue with him to ensure his good health and eventually resolve the issues that occasioned this fast.

Excellency, we are aware that Canada's own history of economic development provides its own examples of deplorable environmental destruction and injustice towards indigenous peoples and other residents. But mistakes of the past offer no license to repeat damaging developments. Rather, they can be inducements to better practices. The world is watching how Brazil's government is responding to opposition to the São Francisco River diversion project. We respectfully ask your government to halt development until dialogue can be reinitiated and agreement negotiated with leaders of affected communities in the region.

Sincerely yours,

Joe Gunn, Coordinator
On behalf of the Members of the Core Committee
Office of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation
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