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Brazil: Amnesty International welcomes ruling in indigenous land case

Amnesty International welcomes the Ministry of Justice's recent decision to declare as indigenous land 18,027 hectares in the region of Aracruz, in the north of Espírito Santo State, and calls on all other outstanding cases to be expedited. This ruling comes after the long-running dispute between the Tupinikim and Guarani peoples and the paper pulping company, Aracruz Celulose, which has established eucalyptus plantations on Tupinikim and Guarani ancestral lands.

Although many steps remain in the process – including negotiations with Aracruz Celulose, physical demarcation of the land by the National Indigenous Foundation (Fundação Nacional do Índio, FUNAI) and ratification of the area by presidential decree – the Ministry of Justice's decision is an important landmark in a case that had been paralysed by inaction.

Years of uncertainty about the legal status of the lands left the Tupinikim and Guarani peoples vulnerable to violence and intimidation. In January 2006, thirteen indigenous people were injured and two villages were burnt down, during a violent eviction carried out by the Federal Police, involving attacks with helicopters, dogs, rubber bullets and tear gas.

Amnesty International calls on the Federal Government to carry out the remaining steps in the process as swiftly as possible, and hopes that this decision signals a fresh determination on the part of the Ministry of Justice to speed up the process of land demarcation for all indigenous Brazilians. In many other parts of Brazil, notably Mato Grosso do Sul, indigenous peoples continue to suffer violence and severe economic deprivation largely because their constitutional right to land still remains unresolved.