

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 19/013/2007

02 May 2007

Further Information on UA 42/07 (AMR 19/005/2007, 16 February 2007) and follow-up (AMR 19/007/2007, 5 March 2007) – Starvation/Health concern

BRAZIL **Scores of people from Dourados Guarani Kaiowa indigenous community**

Deliveries of emergency food parcels to the Dourados indigenous reservation have continued, and the government is taking steps to rectify the situation in the region. The Ministry of Health had responded to the original UA by denying that any of the deaths in the reservation had been caused by malnutrition, directly contradicting a doctor working for the National Health Foundation (*Fundação Nacional de Saúde - FUNASA*) who treated the babies.

FUNASA have pointed out that one of the three deaths, which newspapers had reported as caused by malnutrition, had in fact been due to parental neglect. However, NGOs working in Dourados said that this death was clearly related to broader underlying poverty and social deprivation afflicting the Guarani Kaiowa.

The public outcry surrounding the deaths of indigenous children has had a major impact on government policy.

On 28 March the Federal Public Prosecutor's Office organised meetings with indigenous leaders, anthropologists, activists and federal authorities to discuss solutions to the "humanitarian crisis" in Mato Grosso do Sul. The meeting discussed the problem of ensuring the continued distribution of food parcels and concluded that the only long-term solution was speeding up the identification and demarcation of indigenous lands. In the words of a member of the Guarani community, Ambrósio Vilalba, "The way to combat hunger is through land." (*Quem combate a fome é terra*).

On 19 April, the Day of the Indian (*Dia do Índio*) President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva promised to create an inter-ministerial committee on the situation in Dourados, to improve cooperation between federal bodies, such as the National Indigenous Foundation (*Fundação Nacional do Índio - FUNAI*), FUNASA and the Federal Ministries so as to avoid future crises. In the meantime, federal deputies are calling for a parliamentary inquiry into the deaths from malnutrition in the Dourados reservation.

That day, the recently appointed President of FUNAI, Márcio Meira, said in a radio interview that the problem of malnutrition in Dourados was "extremely serious". He said that although recent coordinated action on the part of the federal and state government had reduced the risk of malnutrition, "Guarani Kaiowa lands are small and precarious and we have a much more complex problem there." (*as terras indígenas são precárias, são pequenas e temos um problema muito mais complexo ali*).

Long-term poverty, overcrowding and social deprivation are still taking their toll in the Dourados Indigenous reservation. According to FUNASA, on 25 April another baby, six-week-old Anderson Amarilha, died of a combination of malnutrition, dehydration and gastroenteritis in the Bororó village.

Amnesty International hopes that the measures now in place will prevent further deaths, and will continue to monitor the situation. No further action is requested from the UA network. Many thanks to all who sent appeals.