

*And its member organisations in Brazil, Justiça Global, and Justiça nos Trilhos*

Press release

**United Nations expert visit to Brazil: after decades of corporate abuses and State neglect, time for redress in Piquiá**

*Paris, Brasilia, December 9, 2019* - On the occasion of the visit of Baskut Tuncak, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Hazardous Substances and Wastes, FIDH, Justiça Global and Justiça nos Trilhos call on the Brazilian State and companies to assume their responsibilities and comprehensively redress the violations of human rights and the environment that the community of Piquiá has been experiencing for more than three decades.

Between Saturday, December 7 and Monday, December 9, the UN expert is in the state of Maranhão; this includes a field visit to Piquiá (Saturday 7), where inhabitants have faced disastrous health impacts caused by environmental and noise pollution emitted by the mining and steel industry. [Although the situation has been denounced for years](http://bit.ly/FIDHGo1), it remains unpunished. Subsequent to the visit, the rapporteur will question the state and federal authorities about the case of Piquiá today (Monday 9) in the capital of the state of Maranhão and later this week in Brasilia.

*"We hope that this visit will give greater international visibility to the case of Piquiá, which has been long ignored by the State. We count on the rapporteur to pressure the authorities to reinforce and effectively implement existing environmental legislation. But we also ask him to deliver a strong call to Vale, Viena Siderúrgica, Gusa Nordeste, Aço Verde Brasil and Cimento Verde Brasil (the last three being part of Grupo Ferroeste) to repair the damages caused and immediately align with existing regulations," said Sandra Carvalho, vice president of FIDH and coordinator of Justiça Global.*

The Special Rapporteur, whose mandate is to monitor the harmful impacts generated by hazardous substances and wastes, **is in a position to alert UN bodies about the violations found in the community of Piquiá, and formulate recommendations.**

For decades now, the population of Piquiá a stood up for its rights and fought for its dignity, day after day. In spite of the violations and a context of scarce resources and limited support, the community did not surrender. It managed to organize and to obtain the resources necessary **to be relocated to a new settlement called Piquiá da Conquista**, where a future far from pollution is being built. However, there is a **risk that the political context in Brazil, especially the budget cuts targeting social programs adopted by Jair Bolsonaro's government, could directly affect the conclusion of the relocation process.**

*"As long as the community of Piquiá continues to face health problems due to air pollution and continues to be exposed to toxic and hazardous wastes resulting from the steel companies' improper management, there will be no comprehensive redress. The UN expert's message must also demand guarantees of non-repetition, so that future generations in Piquiá can enjoy their right to a healthy environment,"* said Danilo Chammas of Justiça nos Trilhos.

Today, **we firmly demand that the Brazilian State** ensure the prompt conclusion and **implementation of judicial decisions in favor** of families negatively affected by the mining, pig iron and steel industry and guarantee **effective reparations**. Investigative procedures must also be initiated and **sanctions** imposed on individuals and legal entities responsible. Companies must be given an explicit order to align with existing legal norms in a strict timeline, and provide **guarantees of non-repetition**. Finally, relevant companies must take the necessary measures to protect families from toxic waste and **immediately stop operating without a license**.

We expect that the Special Rapporteur's visit will serve to put Piquiá back in the public eye and on the decision-making agenda. Tuncak will hold a [**press conference on December 13, 2019 at 14:00 in Brasilia**](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25378&LangID=E), where he will share his preliminary observations. The Special Rapporteur will present a full report with his analyses and recommendations to the UN Human Rights Council in September 2020.

**Press contacts :**

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Press conference of the Special Rapporteur:

* 13 December 2019 at 14:00 (local time)
* Brasília, Casa da ONU, North Embassy Sector Sergio Vieira de Mello Complex Lot 17 - Asa Norte, Brasília - DF, 70800-922