

PIQUIÁ DE BAIXO:

the ideology of economic growth and profit at any price generates a sequence of calamities and the need for urgent measures



FLOOD AND DISRUPTION OF HIGHWAY 222

On March 16, the community of Piquiá de Baixo (Açailândia, Maranhão, Brazil) was flooded and remained underwater for a few days.

Due to the heavy rains, the dams of several fish raising reservoirs of farms upstream of the Piquiá River broke down, causing a violent flood, which invaded the houses of the community, displaced 253 people and destroyed at least 25 houses. Besides the houses, residents lost many of their belongings.

Currently, 17 families remain homeless. The local community buildings (churches, Mothers' Club, school) are serving as a support point for people to take shelter and keep the belongings they managed to remove.

Highway 222, which joins the south of Maranhão to the capital São Luís and other cities in the northeast, was hit by the force of the waters, which opened a wide gullet on the asphalt, needing several days to guarantee circulation throughout the state.

Railway bridges that pass over the community may have their structure compromised.





RAILWAY BRIDGE- PIQUIÁ

1 MARCH 17 - AFTER FLOODS

THIS IS YET ANOTHER TRAGEDY THAT HAS COME TO AFFECT A COMMUNITY THAT HAS BEEN SEVERELY HIT BY NEARLY 35 YEARS OF NEGATIVE IMPACTS AND RIGHTS VIOLATIONS CAUSED BY POLLUTION RESULTING FROM VALE SA'S MINING OPERATIONS AND THE PRODUCTION OF PIG IRON, STEEL, CEMENT AND THERMOELECTRIC ENERGY BY COMPANIES STEELMAKERS THAT SETTLED IN PIQUIÁ, IN THE CONTEXT OF THE GRAND CARAJÁS PROGRAM. CO-RESPONSIBLE FOR THESE VIOLATIONS ARE PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT, DUE TO THEIR COMPLICITY, OMISSION AND NEGLIGENCE, LACK OF INSPECTION AND RESPECT FOR ENVIRONMENTAL LAWS, LACK OF SUPPORT AND EFFECTIVE MEASURES REGARDING THE COMPLAINTS, PROPOSALS AND REMEDIAL ACTIONS DEMANDED BY THE COMMUNITY AND ITS ORGANIZATIONS.

Thus, in March 2020, residents are surrounded by water, affected by pollution, impaired in their respiratory conditions and, still, threatened by the imminent arrival of the Coronavirus.

The current selfless and supportive action of residents of the community, with the admirable support of some institutions and citizens of Açailândia, was fundamental to meet the basic emergency needs of the affected families.

The resettlement of Piquiá is one of the actions required by the community as part of a larger plan for comprehensive reparation for the damages suffered, and prevention of new tragedies. The construction of the new neighborhood, Piquiá da Conquista, began in November 2018 and progresses successfully, under a self-management regime, under the guidance of the residents themselves, through their community association and technical assistance.

"A VIOLENT FLOOD, WHICH INVADED THE HOUSES OF THE COMMUNITY, DISPLACED 253 PEOPLE AND DESTROYED AT LEAST 25 HOUSES."



However, despite popular mobilization, denunciations by national and international organizations and entities, condemnatory sentences in indemnity actions, formal UN positions vis-à-vis the Brazilian State, on-site visit by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on toxic substances and waste and many other initiatives that gave the case a high profile and consistency, resettlement is in serious danger of being interrupted due to lack of financing.

The community of Piquiá de Baixo may be condemned to live in a permanent state of calamity, due to the dismantlement of the solutions that the community itself, courageously and insistently, has been presenting to public authorities and to companies and struggled for.

In this tragic context, we recommend with indignation, vigor and extreme urgency the following series of measures and resolutions:

EMERGENCY FLOOD ASSISTANCE

- shelter and security for homeless families: guarantee of social rent in housing chosen by the families themselves, with security criteria;
- food security guarantee measures for all affected residents, by coordinating the actions of public authorities and the solidarity of Açailândia citizens;
- subsidies for the renovation of damaged houses and for the repair or replacement of damaged furniture;





- rapid recovery of Highway 222 highway and immediate guarantee of other access routes for residents of Piquiá de Baixo to the city of Açailândia, without additional costs to residents, even if the expropriation of private areas is necessary;

- intensification of the work of the Municipal Health Secretariat in Piquiá de Baixo, monitoring of the residents' physical and psychological health conditions and particular prevention from the perspective of possible viral epidemics;

- inclusion of the Pequiá Residents Community Association (ACMP) in the Task Force established by the Municipality of Açailândia with Ordinance no. 403/2020, **to guarantee the role of residents in the definition of emergency support actions for victims.**



PREVENTING NEW DISASTERS

It is not the first time that the dams in the reservoirs for raising fish on farms upstream of the Piquiá River break down. Depending on the intensity of the rains, the rupture of one of them can cause chain damage in the downstream dams, pouring huge amounts of water into the lagoon next to the community of Piquiá de Baixo.

We require the Municipal Secretary of Environment of Açailândia to inspect all the weirs in the region, their construction and maintenance licensing, as well as the responsibility of their owners in case of new damages.



RESETTLEMENT OF PIQUIÁ DE BAIXO (CONSTRUCTION OF PIQUIÁ DA CONQUISTA)

The recommendations of the World Health Organization and Brazilian health authorities regarding measures to prevent contagion and to combat the spread of COVID-19 transmission are known worldwide.

On March 19, 2020, a state of public calamity was declared in the State of Maranhão (State Decree No. 35,672) due to the increase in the number of infections by the H1N1 virus, the existence of suspected cases of contamination by COVID-19, as well as the occurrence of intense rains in certain municipalities in the State, Açailândia included.

On March 21, 2020, the Maranhão State Government issued Decree no. 35,677 / 2020, which prohibits the performance of non-essential activities and services, in order to avoid the crowding of people.

Although the government regulations do not expressly refer to civil construction works in the State of Maranhão and despite the need for families to have a new home in the shortest possible time, the Community Association of Residents of Pequiá (ACMP), together with its technical advisory, USINA (Work Center for the Inhabited Environment), entities responsible for the construction of Pequiá da Conquista, found themselves under the obligation to choose to temporarily interrupt the works.

This measure aims at preserving the health of workers and reducing losses in view of the already announced interruption of transfers of funds by the Federal Government / Caixa Econômica Federal.



PIQUIÁ DA CONQUISTA

RECOMMENDATIONS: RESETTLEMENT OF PIQUIÁ DE BAIXO (CONSTRUCTION OF PIQUIÁ DA CONQUISTA)

- with the cost burden imposed by the new circumstances, the economic and financial rebalancing of the contract established between the Federal Union and ACMP must be guaranteed, with the addition to the budget of resources initially foreseen;
 - the Federal Government and Caixa Econômica Federal must guarantee punctuality and security in the transfer of all installments of the Social Development Fund established for the work;
 - Vale S.A. and Vale Foundation must guarantee punctuality and security in the transfer of the amounts already established in the contract;
 - steel companies, Vale S.A. company, the Federal, State and Municipal Governments must allocate additional funds to cover the budget deficit that has existed since the approval of the project and which tends to increase from now on;
- considering the calamity situation in which the residents of Piquiá de Baixo find themselves, the monthly payments that are incumbent on the residents, according to the rules of the Minha Casa Minha Vida Program, must be canceled.



EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE FOR THE CORONAVIRUS THREAT

On March 11, the World Health Organization declared that humanity lives under a pandemic of the new Coronavirus. The number of cases has been multiplying every day in Brazil. To date, Brazil has 1,546 confirmed cases and 25 deaths. Of these, 02 are confirmed cases of people affected by COVID-19 in the State of Maranhão, while 04 cases are monitored as suspects in the municipality of Açailândia. Unfortunately, the trend is for an exponential increase in the number of cases in the coming weeks across the country.

Most of the residents of Piquiá de Baixo work in the informal sector and/or on their own and cannot work at home. For this reason, they depend on State support to be able to stay at home and ensure their food security, personal hygiene and survival.

In addition, the probable interruption of the construction works at Piquiá da Conquista will affect the income of several families in the community, since several construction workers are from the community itself.

Finally, it should be remembered that, **due to the historical exposure to air pollution and the chronic respiratory diseases resulting from it, all residents of Piquiá de Baixo, regardless of age, are in the so-called risk groups, making the recovery more difficult in case of contamination with the new Coronavirus.**

Thus, it is necessary that: ----->

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- the public health care service for residents is maintained and intensified;

- water supply, electricity supply and garbage collection services in the community be continuous, regardless of the regularity of payment by residents;

- a basic income be adopted for each of the residents of Piquiá de Baixo following the recommendation of Mr. Juan Pablo Bohoslavsky, special UN rapporteur on the effects of external debt on human rights.

RAILWAY BRIDGE SECURITY

The floods most likely also affected the structure of the railway bridges that pass over the community. These bridges are part of the Carajás Railway, under concession to Vale S.A., and are used for the transportation of iron ore, fuels and other goods.

Therefore, we recommend:

- the carrying out of technical assessment by qualified and independent professionals in order to ascertain the situation of the bridge structures, the risks of collapse and the measures to restore security, if necessary;

- the immediate suspension of freight train traffic until it is confirmed by a qualified and independent assessment that the aforementioned bridges are not at risk of collapsing and/or the works necessary for this purpose are completed.

POLLUTING AND DISEASE-CAUSING ACTIVITIES IN PIQUIÁ

Pig iron, steel, cement and thermoelectric power production activities in Piquiá are known to cause illnesses and respiratory diseases to the population in the region.

The state of emergency and public health calamity in which the population as a whole finds itself, and in particular the community of Piquiá de Baixo, demand strict measures to guarantee the right to health of all.

This right cannot be allowed to be sacrificed for the economic interests and the thirst for profit of the companies. Nor, that the population be forced to endanger their health and their lives by the need to work, eat and survive.

We again strongly recommend the implementation of all the recommendations on the right to health and a healthy environment presented in the report of the International Federation of Human Rights in 2011, and still largely unfulfilled up to this date.



SOLIDARITY AND NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT

We call on partner entities and individuals in general to:

- disseminate this support note on Piquiá de Baixo;
- participate in fundraising campaigns for emergency food and possible repair of houses that have been damaged and for the resettlement of the community;
- send communications to federal, state and municipal authorities to meet the demands of the community without delay, including families that are not included in the resettlement;
- send messages of solidarity and support to the Pequiá Residents Community Association (ACMP);
- make known the firm and dignified struggle of this community, through the websites www.piquiadebaixo.com.br and www.justicanostrilhos.org

This fight is ours; this fight belongs to the people! It is with justice and rights that a new world is made!

Piquiá,
March 23, 2020..

Pequiá Residents Community Association (ACMP)

Justiça nos Trilhos

USINA - CTAH

Piquiá Santa Luzia Parish

Comboni Missionaries

Churches and Mining Network

