

14. Octobre 2016

## **CAMPAIGN FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE SURUI PEOPLE AND PRESERVATION OF THEIR NATIVE LAND IN THE AMAZON RAINFOREST**

### **Summary of the campaign:**

Since the beginning of this year, the Surui people are facing a massive and growing invasion of their demarcated native land TERRA INDIGENA DO SETE SETEMBRO, “Indigenous land of the 7th September”. Given the inaction of the new Brazilian government, the Chief of the Surui Indians, Almir Surui Narayamoga, calls for international help to stop illegal exploitation of woods, gold and diamonds on the land of the Indigenous Surui.

Chief Almir Surui currently estimates that 300 truckloads of logs a day carry wood to the many mills that surround the territory of the Indigenous Surui tribe. He also estimates that over 600 hectares were devastated since the beginning of this year. Additionally, the gold extraction techniques seriously pollute rivers with mercury and cyanide and armed men illegally enter the land of the Indigenous Surui, and regularly threaten the Surui families.

This campaign aims to get the Brazilian government to enforce the law that makes these invasions on a demarcated indigenous land totally illegal. Only an official action of the Brazilian state can now stop the ongoing invasion. The Surui people are totally powerless to prevent an ecocide of such magnitude.

### **1. The historical and socio-political context**

A dizzying series of events forced the current generation of Surui people to enter the non-indigenous society. The first official contact with FUNAI, Fundação Nacional do Índio, (National Indian Foundation) only took place, 48 years ago in 1969, when most of the elderly Surui people were either young or still just small children. This new contact with the outside world in 1969 was also tragically marked by an epidemic of measles, which killed more than half of the tribe. Fights then ensued for the Surui to get access to basic medical support and food, to help them increase the population again and maintain their linguistic and cultural heritage... and ultimately, their survival. This pressure from the Surui also helped create a border around their land, which sadly ended in 1976. A decade later, however, illegal practices of totally uncontrolled logging have been re-established in the “Indigenous land of the 7th September”.

In the 1980's, as Brazil was unable to provide alternative sources of income for the Surui families' and also to prevent

## ***ASSOCIAÇÃO METAREILÁ DO POVO INDÍGENA PAITER SURUI***

the Surui from having to face harassment by loggers and miners, the civil servants of the FUNAI encouraged the setting up of illegal commercial agreements between the Surui people and loggers to extract wood. However, this sadly only helped to pave the way for a vicious circle of dependency on wood resources. The same process happened in several indigenous lands of the Rondônia state and illegal logging actually then saw a peak in the 1990's!

In 1986 the World Bank, within the framework of the Polonoeste federal program, financed the tarring of the road from Cuiaba to Porto Velho, which accelerated a migratory process. In less than ten years it transformed the social, cultural and physical structure of Rondônia and Mato Grosso. As a consequence to the building of the road, loggers came and settled in the state and began to degrade the forest firstly by selectively felling trees with commercial value until exhaustion and then clearing the remaining wooded areas. The land, with the support of the government, was thereafter occupied by settlers' families and transformed in to farmland for cattle and agriculture dominated by basic products such as sugar cane and soy.

These industries, providing primarily for the high demand of international markets, have dictated the continuing occupation of indigenous territories. However, these illegal farming practices are not limited to the Surui forests alone, as they have also been widely carried out in Mato Grosso – large areas that were previously covered with forests have now become ranches and farms for the illegal loggers. However, in terms of livelihoods for the local people, there is still no alternative to the wood industry in Rondonia and Mato Grosso, other than for them to inflict further pressure and harassment on to the indigenous people and to rob them of their commercially valuable trees that can only be found in their native forests and other protected areas.

### **2. Initiatives of indigenous peoples**

In 1988, the UNI, Union of Indigenous Nations, was formed in an inter-tribal forum and it sought to establish representations of the indigenous movement at a national level. Its representative, Ailton Krenak, visited the state of Rondônia. The movement of Alliance of Forest People was then formed to protect forests and traditional people who live there. At its peak, it was famously headed by Chico Mendes. Ailton Krenak, who led the native part of the movement, knew the Surui well. He encouraged and supported the creation of the Metareilá Association of the Suruí Indigenous People, the first ethnic organisation, as well as the first indigenous organisation in the state of Rondônia.

The illegal wood trade extracted from indigenous land intensified, and by 1986 it had the approval of the landowners, the local administration of FUNAI notably strengthened by the support of the FUNAI president.

The discussions, reflections and perspectives identified by UNI as part of the Alliance of Forest People led the Surui leaders to understand that forming an association and participating in the national indigenous movement was very important in order for them to live in the future with greater independence and maintain the integrity of their territory. Thus, with the support of UNI, Metareila got its first funding from the Brazilian Ministry of the Environment. The contracted project was meant to use all available means in order to take stock of the “Indigenous land of the 7th September” and to develop sustainable economic projects.

A partnership with the indigenous research Centre of the Catholic University of Goiás was developed, aiming to offer scholarships to the indigenous students of Brazil. The young Almir Surui stood out from amongst the Aboriginal youths and was awarded the scholarship and began his higher education of applied biology.

Only 20 years after the first permanent contact with FUNAI, the Surui Indians Paiter sought to manage the lifestyle imposed on them by this new world, driven on by this contact with Brazilian society. A series frequent and dramatic

## ***ASSOCIAÇÃO METAREILÁ DO POVO INDÍGENA PAITER SURUI***

events caused the traditional ways of the Surui, with its thousand years old knowledge accumulated in the harmony of the forest, to fail. So while their dreams and initial expectations had not been realised, from 1988 to 1990, the Surui began to work intensively with other associations, indigenous people and indigenous people from Rondônia, to actively defend and preserve their land's natural resources through attempting to file complaints and producing several public statements about the marketing of illegal timber from native lands.

In a troubled regional context, CEOs of Metareila followed the development of the PLANAFLORO, The Rondônia Natural Resource Management Project activities, the project ÚMIDAS, Agenda for Sustainable Development of the State Rondonia, and other policies which directly affected the aboriginal issue, such as the implementation of the DSEI Vilhena, Distrito Sanitario Especial Indígena de Vilhena, and others at various levels of government.

### **3. The initiatives of the Surui People**

#### **3.1 Structural considerations**

In 1999, Metareila solicited the support of FUNAI to develop a structural program for the entire native land, called "Paiterey program". What followed was the creation of a partnership with the ethno-environmental protection association Kanindé, which realised a participatory Agro-environmental diagnostic in 2001; and in partnership with ACT Brazil (since named ECAM), drew the ethnic map of the "Indigenous Land of the Seventh of September". Both documents produced at that time were the basis for the construction of an ethno environmental management plan of the "Indigenous land of the 7th September", developed during a long community process that was completed in 2008.

These documents became the main tool used by Chief Almir Surui, coordinator of the Metareila, for the research of partnerships to develop integrated project land management on the Surui territory. The concepts of "life plans" and "land management" was a pioneering act as was finding mechanisms and sources of funding for the implementation of such a global action.

At the same time, other associations were created within the Surui people, to adapt the structures of representation and basic articulation more adequately relative to the varied needs of the four clans and 27 villages of the area. On this occasion, Metareila resumed its basic function in limiting themselves by representing the families of the clan Gameb since the other clans that exist today among the Surui (Gagbir, Makor and Kaban) were now represented by the newly created organisations.

Metareila is now focused on specific actions in its basic community, the most important project being the reforestation project Pamine (Renaissance) that began in 2005 on the outskirts of the village of Lapetanha. The project is supported and funded by the association Kanindé with money obtained using environmental fines sent to them by the state of Rondônia.

#### **3.2 Reforestation and carbon scheme**

After this initial phase, a partnership was initiated with the Swiss environmental organization Aquaverde, which allowed the Surui to continue to amplify their reforestation project in order to restore land to pasture and secondary forest areas and to re-densify areas of primary forest with species that had been cleared by squatter settlers and loggers. Over the years, this activity has been extended to other villages, and to date approximately 190,000 seedlings were planted in their territory.

## ASSOCIAÇÃO METAREILÁ DO POVO INDÍGENA PAITER SURUI

Through this, the development of the project Forest Carbon Surui REDD+ grew and it helps access financial resources that would help implement the "Plan for 50 years" of the Surui people.

### 3.3 Data on the area and the concerned public

The action area of Metareila is the "Indigenous land of the 7th September", located between the states of Rondônia and Mato Grosso, with a surface of 247.869 ha (see map below). The territory is crossed by the upper section of the Rio Branco river (Roosevelt River tributary), bordered in the northeast by the town of Rondolândia and the native land Zoro, in the Southeast through agricultural areas in the region of the municipalities Espigão D'Oeste (RO), in the south-west by the municipalities of Cacoal (RO) and the Ministro Andreazza (RO) to the west.

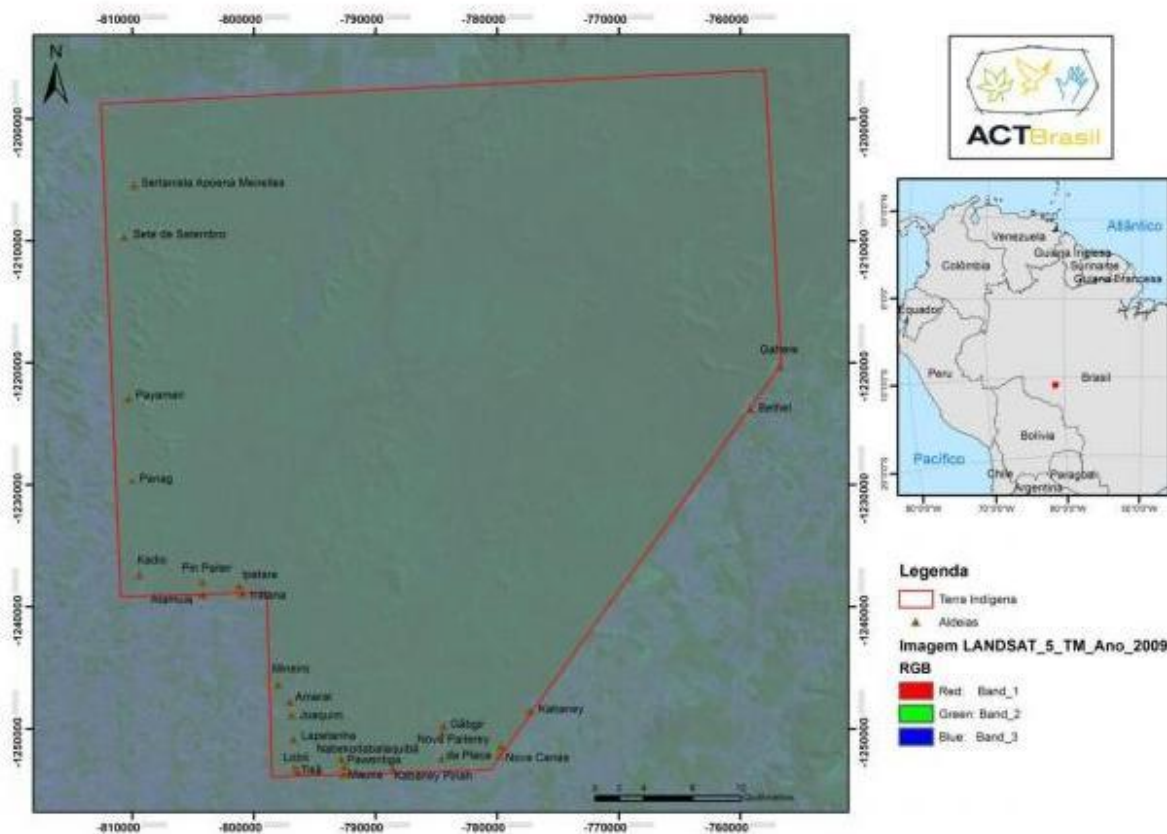


Figura 1 – Aldeias da T.I. Sete de Setembro

Fonte: ACT – Brasil/2008

About 40% of the area (100'468,03 ha) is located in the state of Rondônia and 60% (147'401,73 ha) in the state of

## ***ASSOCIAÇÃO METAREILÁ DO POVO INDÍGENA PAITER SURUI***

Mato Grosso, almost the whole of its population and villages are located in Rondônia, which explains why more and better roads link the indigenous people to the nearest cities, Cacoal and Espigão D'Oeste.

According to the 2010 census produced by Maria do Carmo Barcellos and presented in the survey of socioeconomic "Indigenous Land of the Seventh of September" showed the population of 1'231 Surui people was divided into 215 families living in 25 villages. The families were mostly spread along the southern border, east and west of the country with 24 families living in other places.

In this geographical area it is extremely important to note that the "Indigenous Land of the Seventh of September" covers the municipalities of Cacoal, Ministro Andreazza e Espigão do Oeste in Rondônia and the municipality of Rondonlândia in Mato Grosso is the only remaining territory covered by primary forest.

### **3.4 The driving role of the Metareilá Association**

Metareila has been at the root of the Surui forest carbon project. It has established important partnerships for the drafting of many documents, analysis and subsidies on "TISS" which is: an explanation of the "Indigenous Land of the Seventh of September"; cultural mapping; land surveys and the creation of a territorial protection; the development of handcraft and Brazilian nut trading; the development of eco-tourism; the establishment of a training centre for the Surui people; the training of the youth on information technology; the training of environmental officers amongst the Surui people; the reinforcement of Surui organisations and the transmission of the carbon project to other indigenous people.

Metareila's headquarters are in the same building as the Surui Training Centre in Cacoal, Rua Geraldo Cardoso Campos 4343, quartier Josino Brito, postcode 76961 – 496. This is an area of approximately four hectares with offices, a computer centre, handcraft shop, dormitories and traditional meeting places, kitchen and native forest. This space was originally designed for the work of the Surui People and other ethnic groups of the Rondônia, Mato Grosso and Amazonas region over 30 years ago.

Having been the home of the PACA, Environmental Protection of Cacoal and the Paiter Forum, it is now the training centre for the Paiter Surui which has become significant in indigenous movements at both a regional and national level.

Metareila owns two vehicles for work on the land (pick-up L200 Mitsubishi) and 20 computers for office and groundwork, as well as a camera and a video camera, a projector and other office material.

### **3.5 Democratic Governance**

The Surveillance Board of Metareila is made up of elected Surui leaders and with the guidance of the Association, the Board takes responsibility for its governance. Their decisions are made in consultation with the villages represented in the Association and the Surui Parliament and they follow the directives of the Paiter Ethical Code. They adhere to a wholly democratic process, which involves the representatives of all Surui Communities. For the operational tasks, they follow a code of conduct for their purchases and contracts which is dictated by the Manuel of Financial Procedures developed in 2011 - this manual was developed with the advice and support of the IIEB, International Institute for Education in Brazil.

## **4. The actual situation of the Surui People**

### **4.1 The accomplishments**

In the early years of 2000, the Surui associations made presentations in front of the public ministry, the IBAMA and the FUNAI, as they were determined to find a way to stop the exploitation of wood. But these attempts could not succeed without generating other sources of revenue for the indigenous families, as the revenue from Brazilian nut or rubber extraction did not, and still does not, offer a return equal to that obtained from wood trading.

In 2009, this situation changed. The Surui won a more solid institutional recognition with the realisation that defending their traditions and natural resources could bring with it a way of generating financial resources. These were the first pillars of the Surui Carbon Project. The main communities of the Surui population then signed a pact in which they agreed to stop wood extraction. This agreement is a condition for the validation of the carbon stock which would then be sold on the market of the Voluntary Reduction of Emissions Generated by the Deforestation and Degradation of the Forest, REDD+.

However, whilst these communities and all the Surui people have been committed since 2009 to implement the project, the first sale of Surui carbon credit was only completed in 2013. Additionally, it is only since 2014 that the financial resources from the REDD+ project have reached their final destination - the villages and communities - to develop other projects designed to improve their lives.

The revenue came with the realisation that the carbon credit sales would need an immense number of resources for regular monitoring, account and demand management and to address the development of the project. Although the project will no doubt reach a sustainable balance, it will not alone address the revenue needed to manage and protect the indigenous land. Most of all, the time lapse between getting all villages to adhere to the project and generating the first tangible results, threatens the credibility of the project.

### **4.2 Structural problems**

Generally, it is the social and economic parameters which have led the Surui people currently living in the “Indigenous land of the 7th September”, from the elderly men and women born before the contact in 1969, to the boys and girls who have today just started going to university, to be pulled into a scenario of constant harassment from deforesters and illegal miners, predatory invasions and the effect from the degradation of the forest on the territory.

The information gathering expeditions led in 2014 by Metareila have seen an increasing number of clear signs of invasion on the indigenous territory seeking to extract not only wood, but also minerals, gravel and sand - as well as illegal hunting and fishing.

The slow and fragile process in implementing viable and sustainable alternatives worsens this situation. Whilst there have been attempts to rectify this for many years now, there remain many obstacles (as well as lack of necessary training) which prevent the development of not only a commercially viable industry for wood-derived products of good quality but also give sufficient volume to address the needs of the Surui family.

The *Plano de Ação Participativo para o Desenvolvimento de uma Economia Racional e de Manejo Sustentável dos Recursos Naturais*

# **ASSOCIAÇÃO METAREILÁ DO POVO INDÍGENA PAITER SURUI**

*da Terra Indígena Sete de Setembro* (the plan of collective action for the development of a rational economy and a sustainable management of natural local resources of the “Indigenous land of the 7th September”, from Maria Carmo Barcellos, written in 2010, has analysed the revenue level and the potential to implement sustainable alternatives amongst the indigenous territory.

The Action plan provides detailed socio-economic diagnosis of the Surui people, listing the means to implement different themes of the PGTA of the Surui people, completed in 2008 (attached). This document, largely validated in the development phase amongst the Surui people, has provided guidelines to prioritise the main problems and the appropriate solutions. It has also shown that the situation has considerably worsened, if we take into account the failure in the areas of health and education, as well as accommodation, transport and communication. Such "off-putting" information reinforces the attraction of larger towns to students, leaders or the infirm and their families, who are looking to address their immediate needs. The vulnerability of these people contributes to the difficulty in obtaining real results and sustainable solutions to generate long-term revenue, because it prevents them from training and investing their time to the cause.

## **5. Recent illegal and massive invasion of the Surui territory**

*Please find below an extract of the "Cry for Help" dated 13th October 2016 received from Almir Narayamoga Surui, Chief of the Paiter Surui people :*

### **5.1 Massive illegal and mafia-driven invasion**

"Since the beginning of this year 2016, we are suffering a total invasion of illegal loggers and miners of diamonds and gold. Every day, over 300 trucks leave our territory filled with wood, which represents 600 hectares of deforested forests. And it continues to increase, whilst according to the Constitution of Brazil, it is illegal to deforest an indigenous reservation. On the ground, the illegal loggers have heavy means, with Caterpillar machines. We have found mercury and cyanide in 3 rivers of Surui territory because of the miners!"

### **5.2 Danger to our families**

"The implications are disastrous. In addition to environmental damage and the challenge to our way of life, this invasion directly endangers our families and our children. Indeed, we are under the threat of weapons of loggers and miners! Either one collaborates, or they put a gun to our heads! In addition, they try to bribe some of my people with money. For fear and lack of alternatives, some of my people accept , against their first resolve to protect the forest. The situation is terrible!"

### **5.3 Destruction of ecological advances**

"We, the Surui indigenous people are the first to have set up a REDD+ project to save the Amazon forest, lung of our planet. But this invasion undermines the REDD agreement and goes against the spirit of the COP21 agreements!"

## ***ASSOCIAÇÃO METAREILÁ DO POVO INDÍGENA PAITER SURUI***

### **5.4 Lack of action from the current Brazilian government**

"Despite our appeals for help against this mafia, the new government did not react. By its silence, it is silent accomplice of this destruction of the forest and the endangering of our people!"

### **5.5 Cry for help**

**"We don't know what to do anymore, HELP!"**

*Almir Narayamoga Surui*