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**VIOLENCE BY FARM OWNER “CONDOMÍNIO ESTRONDO”
AGAINST “GERASEIRAS COMMUNITIES” IN THE “RIO PRETO”
REGION, BAHIA WEST, BRAZIL**

Presented as a contribution to
GLOBAL REPORT ON THE SITUATION IN BRAZIL QUILOMBOLA - CIVIL SOCIETY - UPR
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Axis: Conflicts / Violence

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Contextualization:

The mega-latifundia "Condomínio Estrondo" is stage of social and environmental conflicts now reported. It's situated in the municipality of Formosa do Rio Preto, located in the extreme west of the State of Bahia, Brazil. This municipality has a territorial extension of 15,901 square kilometers and a population of 25,652 inhabitants (IBGE, 2014). In 2010, the Municipal Human Development Index - IDHM was in 0.618 (Atlas Brazil 2013 - UNDP).

According to official documents, the "Condomínio Estrondo" covers an area of 295.334 hectares. What once housed the rich biodiversity of the Cerrado, became, within a few years, space for extended grain crops (soy, corn) and fiber (cotton), marketed in domestic and international markets.

In theory, the land occupied by the "Condomínio Estrondo" belongs to public lands headed by the state of Bahia. However, from the year 1975, a business group from Rio de Janeiro managed to seize successively the land in question by notary fraud (a process called "land grabbing") and violent pressures (identified as "banditry") against opponents in the field. These actions have been orchestrated by Ronald Guimarães Levinsohn, a businessman in Rio de Janeiro who had used farmlands as „Estrondo" as guarantees for the "Central Bank", according to a financial deal that ended as a disaster for thousands of depositors, but left unharmed its protagonist. Closely linked to the military rulers of the time, Levinsohn did not answer the injury, nor was troubled by the Central Bank. - In 1999, the Federal Government notified the farm "Estrondo" as a "object of land grabbing" (source: National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform - INCRA: White Paper Grilagem Brasília, 1999), considering irregular and illegal the the landownership by Levinsohn's company. However, up to now, this notification did not produce any practical consequences. - In the early nineties, the "Condomínio Estrondo" started with agricultural exploration on industrial scale. Disrespect against environmental legislation generated a series of lawsuits, most of them without any outcome.

The performance of the "Condomínio Estrondo" has been creating a lot of suffering for natural resources and geraiseiras communities' livelihood. This is the traditional population of the region, who lives and works in the valleys and plateaus high above the „Rio Preto" river. The "Condomínio Estrondo" never respected the traditional territories of these communities. On the contrary, incorporated those territories as environmental reserves controlled by the farm-company. Many geraiseiras families were evicted. Those of them who remained are being trapped in plots smaller and smaller, without access to the territories traditionally used as collective grazing areas and extraction fields.

Identification of the causative enterprise of environmental degradation and violence against traditional communities:

Name or Company name: Agribusiness Condominium Cachoeira Estrondo.

Companies are members of the Condomínio:

- Company of Western Bahia Improvement (CMOB) - CNPJ: 97435234 / 0001-01;
- Hill Paulista - CNPJ: 68756444 / 0001-95;
- Delfim S / A Mortgage Loans - CNPJ: 33923848 / 0001-41.

History and identification of communities victims of violence and environmental degradation:

The region of "Rio Preto" - headwaters were inhabited by indigenous people of various ethnic groups in different historical time, as Xacriabá tribe, the Acroá, the Xerente people. There are reports of occupation by Aymorés (named after Botocudos). The „Rio Preto“ banks were difficult to access, but abundant in water, game, fish, fruit, etc. The last indigenous presence is recorded in a „geraiseiro“ vilag called „Aldeia“ – a place which is also claimed by the “Condomínio Estrondo” – group.

There is a clear black ancestry of many families. Although there is no explicit awareness of negritude or recognition of quilombo descent, color, traits and customs of most geraiseiros in that region refer the origin of African slaves. They came in search of a safe and prosperous place for housing. In memory of geraiseiros, there is the Boniface family who had come a fugitives of the Canudos war. People still know the place where he was buried. Finally, we must consider that this region, which is very rich in water, had received fugitive families of drought and livestock in search of natural pastures.

“The region is composed of several communities along the rivers Preto, Sapão and Rio Santo. They are: Buritizinho, São Marcelo, Furtuoso, Cacimbinha, Cachoeira, Barra do Rio, Marinheiro, Vereda do Gado, Barra do Tapui, Prazeres, Cana Brava, Boqueirão, Mutamba, Mato Grosso and Beira d'Água. These communities are linked by family ties and share a way of life characteristic of the general that is considered “geraiseiro”. The connection to the rivers through fishing, agriculture, cleaning and leisure gives them also a riverside identity. The occupation of space and time are related to rivers, which allowed them a specific ecological experiences regarding the use of the rivers and the surrounding nature (flora and fauna); within, these communities are to be considered as traditional communities.”¹

The legal definition of "traditional communities" is the Decree of the President of the Republic No. 6040 of 07 February 2007. They are understood as

¹ **BAHIA.** Projeto Oeste: Proteção das Águas nas Sub-bacias dos rios Grande, Corrente e a margem esquerda do rio Carinhanha. Tomo 1º. Relatório Sócio Antropológico. Salvador/BA: INGÁ, 2010, p. 73

"Culturally different groups and are recognized as such, which have their own forms of social organization, which occupy and use territories and natural resources as a condition for their cultural, social, religious, ancestral and economic, using knowledge generated innovations and practices transmitted by tradition." (Art. 3, i).

In the same Decree, "Traditional Territory" is defined as

"the necessary spaces for cultural, social and economic reproduction of traditional peoples and communities, whether used permanently or temporarily, noted, with regard to indigenous peoples and Maroons, respectively, which have the Arts. 231 of the Constitution and 68 of the Transitory Constitutional Provisions and other regulations. " (Art. 3, ii)

This representation reports the following communities (respectively the number of families living in them) as victims of environmental and social atrocities caused by the "Condomínio Estrondo":

- Cachoeira: 7 families
- Marinheiro: 4 families
- Área de Salú: 3 families
- Cacimbinha: 22 families
- Gatos: 4 families
- Aldeia: 25 families

In total, there are living actually about 400 people.

Main aggressions by the "Condomínio Estrondo" against geraiseiras communities:

- Ocupacion of traditional territories which belong to geraiseiro communities;
- Construction of partition fences that cross the traditional territories of geraiseiro communities;
- Maintenance of permanent armed watchmen within the traditional territories of geraiseiro communities;
- Prohibition of free movement of geraiseiro communities within the traditional territories;
- Ban of free access to watercourses within the traditional territory of geraiseiro communities;
- Pollution of the waters that run through the traditional territory of geraiseiro families, by pesticides;
- Threats and physical attacks by armed guards against members of geraiseiro families;
- Elimination of plants and animals, due to rampant deforestation and exorbitant pesticide applications.

Ongoing measures:

In order to promote the repair of environmental damage caused in the aforementioned context, the Public Ministry of the State of Bahia commissioned a characterization study and design of damaged goods or services, type of environmental damage and suggestion of method of economic and social evaluation of the project "Condomínio Estrondo" in Formosa do Rio Preto - BA.

In September 2016, this study was delivered to the prosecutor. The authorship belongs to the company AST Consulting and Planning Ltda. (Mucugê Street, 133, Room 203, Business Lauro de Freitas Centro CEP 42700-000, Lauro de Freitas – BA, phone: (71) 3450-7152, e-mail: ast@svn.com.br).

However, the "Condomínio Estrondo" does not care about a pacification of the conflict. On the contrary: From the year 2015, the pressures of the "Condomino Estrondo" against traditional communities have been increasingly intense.

Their occurrences were registered at the police station in Formosa do Rio Preto. However, Police is omitted to ascertain the aggressions against the communities - the public security organs seem to be surrendered to economic power of big players in the agrobusiness.

The Cerrado in western Bahia is considered as of the most dynamic agricultural frontiers in Brazil. In order to it, land prices are very high. On the other hand, land regularization policy is very weak. This gives opportunity for various frauds within trade of rural properties.

The main victims of this disorder are the *geraiseiro* communities, whose territorial domains are guaranteed by Brazil's constitution, but so often ignored by agrobusiness-companies.

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