

**Allegation letter sent by the Special Rapporteur on the
rights of indigenous peoples**

Information from the Government of Brazil

The Araribóia Indigenous Land (Terra Indígena Araribóia - TI Araribóia) has a surface area of over 413 thousand hectares in the State of Maranhão, encompassing parts of the municipalities of Amarante do Maranhão, Arame, Bom Jesus das Selvas, Buriticupu, Grajaú and Santa Luzia. In the first half of 2014, a large operation has been carried out to remove non-indigenous persons who were then occupying parts of the land ("operação de desintrusão").

In the Araribóia Indigenous Land there are 30 indigenous firefighters. Members of local indigenous peoples, they were hired and trained by the Brazilian Institute of Environment and Renewable Natural Resources (IBAMA), in co-operation with the National Foundation for Indigenous Peoples (FUNAI), and are part of the Federal Brigades Programme, which comprises a total of 1413 firefighters positioned all over the Brazilian territory, of which 608 are indigenous.

Consistent with their attributions and with the applicable procedures, the indigenous firefighters from Araribóia warned the central command from IBAMA in Brasília (PREVFOGO) as soon as they spotted signs of forest fire in their land on 22 September 2015. Three days later, a team from Brasília and other parts of the country arrived in the area to join forces with local firefighters. In the following days, the Awá Operation was put in place, with an integrated command structure and a multidisciplinary team of over 280 personnel from IBAMA, FUNAI, the Firefighters Corps of the State of Maranhão, and the Brazilian Army. The team carried out land-based and airborne operations with the support of 25 vehicles, 2 tractors, 4 helicopters and 2 airplanes. The operation also benefitted from international co-operation with the generous donation by the government of Chile of 20.000 litres of non-toxic fire retardant, which were diluted in water and sprayed over critical areas with the use of aircraft.

According to the Ministry of the Environment, the forest fire had three different sources: (i) fires set by farmers in areas outside TI Araribóia to clear plantation plots, which accidentally spread to the Indigenous Area; (ii) fires set inside TI Araribóia by indigenous farmers according to their traditional agricultural practices, which got out of control; (iii) fires set

inside TI Araribóia by illegal invaders, especially loggers. Because the fires had different sources distributed over a very large forested area with few roads, it took more than one month until the fire was totally extinguished and the operation was concluded on 3 November 2015. In the end, approximately half of the surface of TI Araribóia was burnt.

FUNAI has designated specialised personnel to monitor and prevent harms to indigenous communities, especially the Awá people who live in voluntary isolation, and who are therefore particularly vulnerable. Priority was given to fighting forest fires in areas known to be occupied by the Awá and, to the extent possible, the use of aircraft, tractors and other mechanical equipment was avoided in those places. Firefighters were also instructed to avoid any contact with said communities.

Special teams of the Ministry of Health were present in TI Araribóia all along the operation to provide assistance to the indigenous communities and to the firefighters.

During Awá Operation, teams from IBAMA and the Federal Police gathered evidence and carried out criminal investigations about illegal activities that contributed to the forest fires. Illegal charcoal kilns and sawmills were dismantled and several invaders were arrested.