

## Summary of the opening event of the session of the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal in defense of the Cerrado territories

September 10, 2021

During the opening event of the session of the [Permanent Peoples' Tribunal \(PPT\)](#), the [National campaign in defense of Cerrado](#) publicly presented and handed over to the PPT's panel of judges the indictment on which its complaint is based. In it, the Brazilian State, foreign States, international organizations and transnational companies are held responsible for the crime of ecocide against the Cerrado and the cultural genocide threat against the peoples of the Cerrado.

As stated by the Secretary-General of the PPT, **Gianni Tognoni**, "what is happening in Brazil, in particular in the Cerrado, refers to the international challenge of recognizing ecocide". In his speech, Gianni Tognoni highlighted that one of the purposes of this PPT session is to guarantee a platform of visibility for populations that do not receive attention from Brazilian institutions and the international community. For the Secretary-General, the first function of the PPT is to recognize the victims of a long-lasting repression - the traditional peoples and communities of the Cerrado - as subjects of their own history and, at the same time, the rights of the peoples of the Cerrado as a category of justice and democracy.

The journalist and member of the National Coordination of Black Rural Communities in Quilombolas (Conaq), **Maryellen Crisóstomo**, led the first moment of the launch event and offered solidarity to the indigenous peoples protesting against the law called *marco temporal*. "We intend to bring to the attention of Brazilian society and the international community the violations of human rights of the peoples and traditional communities that inhabit the Cerrado, who have suffered serious repercussions over time for defending ecosystems and biodiversity", said Maryellen.

**Valéria Santos**, a representative of the National campaign in defense of the Cerrado, spoke of the imminent risk of extinction of the biome in the coming years and the threat of cultural genocide of the peoples and traditional communities whose existence depends on the Cerrado. "Almost half a century ago the Cerrado became a battlefield. We are losing our *living pharmacies*, entire communities are being stripped of their land rights, expelled, and even killed, which has intensified over the past three years with the agribusiness-backed Bolsonaro government," she stressed.

Federal deputy **Luiza Erundina**, vice-president of the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal, also present at the inauguration, recalled Lelio Basso, founder of the PPT, and the ancient roots of solidarity expressed by the Lelio and Lisli Basso Foundation and by the Tribunal for the defense of democracy in Brazil. "The PPT is a space in which the injustices that are done to our peoples have the opportunity to be denounced", said Erundina, noting that the PPT will carry out the session on the Cerrado at a time of profound economic, social and political crisis in Brazil, with real risks for democracy and the rule of law. "Our struggle for democracy is permanent. Democracy is the right to full citizenship", concluded the deputy.

## **The complaint**

In the second part of the launch of the PPT, the geographer and professor **Carlos Walter Porto-Gonçalves**, the researcher and component of the Cerrado defense campaign **Diana Aguiar**, and the coordinator of the Cerrado network, **Maria do Socorro Teixeira Lima**, presented facts and data that support the indictment and the denunciation of the crime of ecocide against the Cerrado and the threat of cultural genocide of the peoples who have been linked to this savannah for millennia. According to the requesting organizations, the crime of ecocide committed against the Cerrado is a systemic crime, aggravated in recent years by the policies promoted by the Bolsonaro government, Diana Aguiar said. "It is not a question of seeking ecocide in specific cases - although these are the most concrete expression of it -, but of understanding, from the emblematic cases and analyses for the whole Cerrado, the geographical and temporal systematic nature of the crime of ecocide committed against the Cerrado ", explained the researcher.

The threat against Cerrado is strengthened with the expansion of the agri-food industry. "About 95% of the region is flat, the large agricultural holdings that concentrate their plantations in the Cerrado plains take advantage of this. With foreign technologies focused on land exploitation and the unbridled use of pesticides, the soil is compacted by draining rivers, aggravating the country's water problem," explained the geographer. The professor also recalled that the Brazilian government has helped to spread the use of these large monocultures also through foreign investments in research for the development of soybean monoculture. By 1976, Brazil had produced 12 million tons of soybeans. Last year, production reached 120 million tons. Of this total, 75% is produced in the Cerrado. The consequences are also felt on the health of the population. According to Carlos Walter, "one of the most accepted hypotheses among scientists debating the beginning of the pandemic is in the process of devastation of biomes, traditional areas that make room for zoonoses that find the conditions for their existence in humans".

The coordinator of the Cerrado network Maria do Socorro Teixeira reported the wisdom of the peoples who interact harmoniously with the biome. "No, we don't defend, we protect the waters and the forests. They call what they make progress. For me, sustainable progress is my pequi tree because it bears pequi [fruits] every year. What they call progress is devastation," she said.

## **Acceptance of the indictment and opening of the PPT session**

In the final part of the event, **Simona Fraudatario** of the General Secretariat of the PPT presented the composition of the panel of judges and stressed the centrality of the independence criterion used for its designation. The panel of judges for the PPT session on the Cerrado is composed by, in alphabetical order: **Antoni Pigrau Solé**, professor of international law at the Rovira i Virgili University of Tarragona, Spain; the jurist and former Deputy Attorney General of the Republic of Brazil **Deborah Duprat**; **Mons. José Valdeci** of the Diocese of Brejo, Brazil; the Brazilian journalist **Eliane Brum**; Venezuelan sociologist **Rosa Acevedo Marin**, professor at the Federal University of Pará; the Uruguayan journalist and researcher of the ETC Group **Silvia Ribeiro**; the indigenous leader and executive coordinator of APIB (Articulation of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil) **Sônia Guajajara**, and the Portuguese **Teresa Almeida Cravo**, professor of international relations at the University

of Coimbra. The French jurist **Philippe Texier**, current president of the PPT, is also part of the panel.

In their interventions, the judges highlighted the consistency and richness of the elements supporting the complaint and the indictment. Philippe Texier has officially opened the investigation of the PPT which will be composed of three thematic hearings and a final hearing that will take place throughout 2021 and 2022.