

# CERRADO<sup>1</sup>, THE CRADLE OF WATER WITHOUT THE CERRADO THERE IS NO WATER

An open letter in defense of the Cerrado

Brasília, 18 November 2016

We, Peasants, Family Farmers, Indigenous Peoples, Quilombolas, Collective Land Users, Fisherfolk, Social Pastorals, Civil Society and supporters of the National Campaign for the Defense of the Cerrado; representatives of Mozambican peasant communities, Japanese environmental activists, as well as Brazilian organizations participating in the No to ProSavana Campaign, convened in the National Seminar "MATOPIBA: conflicts, resistances and new dynamics of agribusiness expansion in Brazil", in Brasilia/DF on 16, 17 and 18 November 2016, where we debated the processes of the Cerrado's land destruction and its impacts and consequences on the peoples.

The biome of the Cerrado, also known as the Cradle of Water, is home to three great aquifers (Guarani, Bamuí and Urucuia) and is responsible for the formation and feeding of the continent's great rivers, such as São Francisco, Tocantis and Araguaia. It has over 12,000 species of catalogued plants (30% under threat of extinction); it is home for half of Brazilian birds and reptiles; and also over 200 species of mammals.

Historically the indigenous and traditional communities who inhabit the Cerrado land have developed strategies for living in a harmony with nature, playing the role of guardians of this biodiversity.

Due to the importance of this heritage of our peoples and communities, we manifest our indignation against the current framework of proposals for the expansion of agribusiness in the Cerrado.

Policies, plans and projects, which started in the 1970s, depended on national and international investments. They have been currently renamed as the Agriculture and Livestock Development Plan of MATOPIBA (PDA MATOPIBA). Instituted by Decree No 8447, this proposal is nothing more than the continuation of the old developmentalist policy promoting environmental degradation, slave-like working conditions and social and economic inequalities in Brazilian rural areas.

There has been increased pressure on traditionally occupied lands generating an intensive process of land grabbing and land speculation, increasing land conflicts. Between 2005 and 2014 a total of 11,338 Brazilian localities were involved in land conflicts, of which 39% took place in the Cerrado.

In the last 10 years the greatest number of workers freed from slave-like conditions has been from the states of Tocantis, Maranhão and Bahia. It was also in those States where most cases occurred in Brazil.

The testimonies and reporting from peasant leaders show a systematic process of human rights violations including: the deterritorialization of communities; disappearing water resources; pollution of water sources for human consumption through the abusive use of agricultural pesticides in monocultures; land degradation and contamination; and the extinction of important native trees and fruits to the region's food culture such as pequi, buriti, bacuri and bacaba, worsening the situation of food insecurity of communities.

In the same way, representatives of peasant movements in Mozambique have reported that this same economic logic based on an agro-export model is also present in Africa, through Brazilian and Japanese investments in the ProSavana project in the Nacala Corridor, destroying the way of life of the communities.

This is why we, participants of this Seminar, manifest our rejection of PDA MATOPIBA and ProSavana and confirm our position in defense of the Cerrado and the peasant communities of the Nacala Corridor in Mozambique; and we demand:

- An Agrarian Reform and the regularization of Indigenous, Quilombolas and Traditional Community Territories;
- Public policies that strengthen family agriculture, based on Agroecology, Food Sovereignty and Sustainable Territorial Development of Peoples and Traditional Communities, based on traditional practices;
- The approval of Constitutional Amendment 504/2010, which alters the 4th paragraph of Article 225 of the Federal Constitution, to include the Cerrado and the Caatinga as part of the biomes considered to be National Heritage;
- The institution of a Cerrado Moratorium to stop the advance of agribusiness monocultures over the lands, territories, waters and peoples of the Cerrado;
- Compliance with ILO Convention 169 which establishes the right to free, prior and informed consultation for traditional peoples and communities regarding PDA MATOPIBA;
- Respect of the peoples sovereignty and of the principle of South-South solidarity for the realization of a development which considers the identity and interests of the peasants of the Nacala Corridor;

We call upon Society to take part in the Campaign in Defense of the Cerrado - The Cradle of the Waters. Without the Cerrado, there is No Water and No Life. An end should be put on the aggression and destruction of this biome, the oldest in the planet. The Cerrado and its Peoples deserve care and respect.

Participants of the Campaign in Defense of the Cerrado: Apinajés Villages Union Association /PEMPXA (Associação União das Aldeias Apinajés/PEMPXA) - ActionAid Brazil - CNBB/ Social Pastorals - 10involvement Agency - APA/TO - ANQ - AATR/BA - ABRA - APIB - CPT - CONTAG - CIMI - CUT/GO - CPP - Brazilian Cáritas - CEBI -CESE - CEDAC - Collective Land users of West of Bahia - Truth

Commission on Black Slavery of DF - CONAQ - FASE - FBSSAN - FETAET - FETAEMA - CONTRAF-BRASIL/FETRAF - Gwatá/UEG - IBRACE - ISPN - MJD - MIQCB - MPP - MMC - MPA - MST - MAB - MOPIC - SPM - Cerrado Network - Redessan - Human Rights Social Network - Agro ecology Network of Maranhão - TIJUPA - Via Campesina - FIAN Brasil.

[1] Cerrado literally means “thick, dense land” and is a major biome and territory within Brazil.