

Indigenous people attacked by the police during a peaceful protest against Bill 490/2007, in Brasília

Children and elderly people were among the protesters; two indigenous people were hospitalized and 10 were injured in the attack.

Brasília, Brazil, June 22 2021 - A group of Indigenous peoples, including children and elderly people, was attacked by the Brazilian Military Police, this Tuesday afternoon, during a peaceful protest in Brasília against a congressional vote on Bill 490/2007 (PL490). The proposed legislation would nullify the demarcation of Indigenous Territories and is pending a vote in the Commission of Constitution and Justice (CCJ) of the Chamber of Deputies. The attacks occurred in the parking lot of the Chamber, with the police shooting rubber bullets and tear gas bombs into the crowd.

Two Indigenous people are under observation at Brasília's Base Hospital, with serious injuries. A dozen children, elderly people and women were injured and are receiving treatment in the health tent of the Rise for the Earth Camp. Emergency care for wounded Indigenous people was complicated by the presence of riot police at the site, as documented by cameras at the moment of the attack.

Indigenous people were marching peacefully along Brasília's Esplanade of Ministries, when they were met with tear gas bombs shot from a barricade set up by police shock troops at the entrance of the Chamber. The Indigenous protesters committed no action or incident to justify such a violent reaction by the police. Eye witness reports detail the presence of Legislative, Military and Shock Battalion police at the scene, including intentionally repressive equipment such as a "caveirão" (the Shock Troop's armored vehicle) and police cavalry.

The indigenous march is part of the Rise for the Earth Camp, which has been established for the past three weeks next to Brasília's National Theater. There are approximately 850 indigenous people from 48 different peoples from across Brazil, many of whom marched to the CCJ to follow the vote on PL490.

"The relatives [indigenous people] only came to demonstrate against the passing of the bill that will end the demarcation of indigenous lands, and the police soon started throwing bombs," said Alessandra Korap Munduruku. "They are allowed to assemble to take away our rights, but when we try to demonstrate, we are treated with brutality. We came here with children and elderly people too, a lot of people were struck [by projectiles] or felt sick."

"We were brutally and cowardly attacked before we arrived to follow the vote. We have injured Indigenous people and the police threw bombs on our paramedics, making it difficult to provide care," said Dinamam Tuxá, Executive Coordinator of the Association of Brazil's Indigenous Peoples (APIB).

"I am distressed because many comrades have been injured," said Federal Deputy Joênia Wapishana. "We are going to work so that this project does not return for a vote. We are

not fighting for new things, but for rights guaranteed in the Federal Constitution,” she added, emphasizing that opposition lawmakers will use all legal instruments available in Congress to prevent the vote.

The fighting goes on

Today's session at the CCJ has been postponed, and is scheduled to resume tomorrow. Allies for the indigenous cause in the Congress set up a human shield and managed to refrain the troops from advancing, but the police continued to threaten the Indigenous people who were performing rituals and chants. Later, several opposition lawmakers met with the demonstrators. They criticized the actions of the Legislative and Military Police, and vowed to report it to the President of the Chamber, Arthur Lira (PP-AL).

Bill 490 is a priority for members of the so-called ruralista caucus and other allies to President Bolsonaro. If approved it will make Indigenous land demarcations unfeasible, allow the annulment of the past titling of Indigenous Territories and pry them open to predatory projects, such as mining, roads and major hydroelectric plants. It is an unconstitutional measure and poses a new genocidal menace against Indigenous peoples.

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