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# Leaders of Brazilian movement opposed to controversial Belo Monte dam threatened with imprisonment, for Lawful Protests

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## *International Groups Denounce Attempts to Criminalize Civil Society Leaders before OAS and UN Human Rights Bodies*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Altamira (PA), Brazil – Brazilian social movements and civil society organizations are facing politically motivated prosecutions for their lawful opposition to the Belo Monte dam complex in the heart of the Amazon, a leading international human rights and environmental organization said today. In a report issued to the human rights arms of the Organization of American States (OAS) and the United Nations (UN), Brazilian and international groups detailed attempts to prosecute human rights and environmental activists and seek the arrests of 11 civil society leaders.

Among the accused are a local reporter, leaders of the Xingu Alive Forever Movement, a Catholic priest and nun who led a mass during the Xingu+23 protest, a documentary filmmaker and a fisherman whose house was recently demolished to make way for dam construction.

“The complaints filed by the dam consortium and the request for arrest warrants are based on fabricated information and gross distortions of the facts, with the clear intention of criminalizing leaders of a legitimate social movement opposed to the federal government’s obsession with the construction of Belo Monte, regardless of the project’s human and environmental costs and the rule of law”, said Marco Apolo, lawyer and co-director of SDDH, a renowned human rights NGO based in the state of Para.

The police request for the arrest still pending approval in a local court, came in response to a

complaint filed by of the consortium of companies building the dam. The peaceful protests organized by Brazilian civil society groups were celebrating 23 years of resistance to the project. Activities were focused in Santo Antonio, a small riverside village whose inhabitants are being displaced by construction of the large dam. In an isolated incident, a small group of protestors autonomously entered the offices of the consortium, causing some damages. Despite the absence of evidence linking the incident to the leaders of the movement and the protests, the police request for arrest warrants charges them with invasion and damage to private property, theft, arson, and disturbing the peace.

“We expect a prompt response from the OAS and the UN regarding this blatant attempt to intimidate and criminalize human rights and environmental defenders working to protect the communities affected by Belo Monte,” stated Joelson Cavalcante, a Brazilian lawyer with the Interamerican Association for Environmental Defense (AIDA), which co-authored the report. “The Brazilian government cannot simply silence critiques of its development policy by putting them in jail.”

Some of the accused also are plaintiffs in a case before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights against Brazil for failing to consult local communities and ignoring important safeguards to protect the rights and environment of the people affected by the dam. In April 2011, the Inter-American Commission requested special measures to protect the rights of 12 indigenous communities. The Brazilian government has refused to comply with the resolution so far.

Brazilian and international groups, including AIDA, have raised multiple claims of human rights violations surrounding the development of the Belo Monte dam. The project would seriously harm the lands and livelihoods of indigenous and rural communities including un-contacted tribes in voluntary isolation. The dam is slated to be the world’s third largest and displace as many as 40,000 families.

The attempt to silence protest against the project comes in the wake of recommendations from the UN Human Rights Council calling on the Brazilian government to safeguard the work of human rights defenders and protect the human rights of indigenous and African-descendant communities.

“Belo Monte is a sad example of misdirected development policy gone awry,” said Astrid Puentes, Co-Director of AIDA. “We expect the Brazilian government to heed the recommendations of the UN and OAS and promote truly just and sustainable development, demonstrating that statements made at the Rio +20 Conference are real. Stopping the unwarranted criminalization of human right defenders in the Xingu would be a positive step in that direction.”

For more information:  
[www.xinguvivo.org.br](http://www.xinguvivo.org.br)

AIDA's work on the Belo Monte Hydroelectric Dam  
Belo Monte Dam Controversy to be part of UN's Review of Brazil's Human Rights Record

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AIDA defends the individual and collective right to a healthy environment through the development, implementation, and enforcement of national and international law. "Human Rights and the Environment" is one of our five areas of institutional focus. Environmental health and human health are two sides of the same coin, and AIDA works to bridge the divide between the two issues and push back against large-scale infrastructure developments that threaten natural ecosystems and the communities that depend on them.

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<http://www.aida-americas.org/en/release/leaders-brazilian-movement-opposed-controversial-belo-monte-dam-threatened-imprisonment-lawf>