

Montreal, 27 November 2019

Mr. Baskut Tuncak,
UN Special Rapporteur on Hazardous Substances and Wastes

Dear Mr. Tuncak,

As the official international development agency of the Catholic Church in Canada, Development and Peace works in partnership with community organizations, human rights groups and other civil society organizations, to promote our goals of human development, justice and human rights in countries of the Global South.

Hazardous and toxic wastes produced by mining companies in countries with low governance indicators is an issue that is constantly brought to our attention by partner organizations in the countries where we work. The purpose of this letter is to request a visit to a community severely impacted by activities of the mining-steel chain in the municipality of Açailândia, state of Maranhão, during your upcoming visit to Brazil.

In this case, the response of the Brazilian government to water and soil pollution caused by iron plants and coal furnaces owned by the Vale mining company and others has been inadequate. Such pollution has caused respiratory problems, eye and skin problems, and various other afflictions. The proximity of waste products and pig iron production to the populated areas has also caused accidents, including serious and fatal burns.

In May 2011, our Maranhão based partner, Justiça nos Trilhos, the International Federation of Human Rights, (FIDH) and Justiça Global (FIDH member organization) published the report **'Brazil: how much are human rights worth? - The impacts on human rights related to the mining and steel industry in Açailândia'**¹. Eight years later, the Brazilian state has failed to adopt the recommendations of this report, including implementing a strategy to address the health problems faced by the communities and the relocation of more than 300 families adversely affected by the activities of Vale and other steel producing companies. The factories involved have continued to operate without adopting any measures to reduce pollution. The community of Piquiá de Baixo, and more than 7500 inhabitants of the wider Piquiá region, continue to live in a polluted environment and suffer the associated risk on a daily basis.

¹ Full report in English available here : https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/report_brazil_2012_english.pdf
and Executive Summary in English here : https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/resume_Bresil_UK-LD2-2.pdf

Justiça nos Trilhos is an organization based in Maranhão, with many years of experience of working with the communities affected by mining activities. Larissa Santos, the vice-director or Brother Simão Della Monica, the director of finance (who speaks English), would be pleased to organize a visit to the Piquiá de Baixo community for you, and to provide further briefing material on the situation impacting the community prior to your visit.

We sincerely hope that you will follow up on this proposal. Please do not hesitate to be in contact with us if we can help you with any further information you need. See Rede Justiça nos Trilhos contact information and contact persons below, in case you would rather contact them directly.

Yours sincerely,



Anne Catherine Kennedy

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Rede Justiça nos Trilhos contact information

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Mikaell Carvalho - Director-President (but currently ill and not picking up emails)