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OPEN LETTER

Under Bolsonaro, democracy, forests and their peoples face enormous risk

Today, on the Ninth of November, through the news article “Bolsonaro administration plans rule to control the action of NGOs in the Amazon”, published by O Estado de São Paulo newspaper, we became aware that one of the goals of the Amazon Council is “to obtain control of 100% of the NGOs that work in the Amazon Region, by 2022, in order to authorize the operation of only those that serve national interests”. Such goal would allegedly be related to the objective of “creating a regulatory framework for the operation of NGOs”, which is stated in the official documents of the Council.

The actions of civil society organizations are a living expression of plural ideas, whose freedom is guaranteed under the Brazilian Constitution. Any attempt to control such actions would ultimately represent an attempt to silence constitutional freedoms. The Brazilian Supreme Court, on March 6, 2019, decided that “any legal provision that has the clear purpose of controlling or destroying the force of critical thinking, which is indispensable to the democratic regime, is unconstitutional”.

Thus, the report that, in official meetings that involve a large number of ministries, members of the current administration expressly presented proposals that violate the democratic rule in force in this country is extremely serious and disgusting. The Brazilian Constitution forbids any type of interference by the State in the creation, functioning or even standing of Brazilian civil society organizations. The autonomy of civil society, as well as free press and economic freedom, are essential and immutable constitutional clauses. The proposals mentioned in the news article, and referred to in internal government documents, could only be compared to those made by other authoritarian regimes around the world, in which freedom of press, expression and association have been suppressed to make room for autocracies.

The attacks from the Bolsonaro administration to civil society are a sad staple of its way of doing politics. Attempts at controlling NGOs were exercised before by the Executive branch and duly rejected by Congress. Such was the case of Provisional Measure (MP) 870/2019. In December 2019, agents from the National Intelligence Agency (Abin) were sent to the Chile-Madrid Climate Conference (COP25) to spy on Brazilian NGOs. In Brazil, the President of the Republic himself has disdained the Constitution many times, participating in demonstrations whose purposes was to attack other branches of the Government. In a recent statement, Bolsonaro even complained about not being able to “kill this cancer called NGOs”.

In spite of the enduring and revolting smear campaign against NGOs moved by government officials, it is worth recalling that Brazil already has legislation to regulate third sector organizations – the so-called Marco Regulatório das Organizações da Sociedade Civil (MROSC), established by Law 13.019/2014 and Decree 8.726/16.

The National Council of the Legal Amazon, an inept institution, with no social representation and hardly any positive outcome in the defense of the forest, should present the country with

a plan to reduce deforestation, environmental crimes, land grabbing and forest fires. Instead, what we see is that this Council is being used as a means to devise a plan to silence critics of the government and to stifle democracy.

Under the Bolsonaro administration, democracy, like forests and their inhabitants, face enormous risk. That is why the undersigned organizations call on the Brazilian people to join the initiatives to defend the rights of indigenous peoples and traditional peoples and to support their struggle to defend the Amazon, democracy and all constitutional rights.

Signed by:

1. ACT Promoção da Saúde
2. AMAR Associação de Defesa do Meio Ambiente de Araucária
3. Amigos da Terra - Amazônia Brasileira
4. Articulação dos Povos Indígenas do Brasil - APIB
5. Associação Brasileira de ONGs - Abong
6. Associação Mineira de Defesa do Ambiente - Amda
7. Associação do Movimento dos Agentes Agroflorestais Indígenas no Acre (AMAAIAC)
8. Associação de Preservação do Meio Ambiente e da Vida - APREMAVI
9. Associação Mico-Leão-Dourado
10. Centro Brasil no Clima
11. Cidades Afetivas
12. COESUS Coalizão Não FRACKING Brasil
13. Comissão Pró-Índio do Acre (CPI-Acre)
14. Conectas Direitos Humanos
15. Delibera Brasil
16. FASE - Federação de Órgãos para Assistência Social e Educacional
17. Fórum Brasileiro de ONGs - FBOMS
18. Fórum Nacional de Educação Escolar Indígena - FNEEI
19. Fundação Grupo Esquel Brasil
20. Fundação SOS Mata Atlântica
21. Fundação Tide Setubal
22. Geledés Instituto da Mulher Negra
23. Gestos - Soropositividade, Comunicação e Gênero
24. Greenpeace Brasil
25. Grupo de Trabalho da Sociedade Civil para a Agenda 2030 (GT 2030)
26. Iniciativa Verde
27. Instituto Alana
28. Instituto Çarakura
29. Instituto Centro de Vida - ICV
30. Instituto Climainfo
31. Idec - Instituto Brasileiro de Defesa do Consumidor
32. Instituto Ethos de Empresas e Responsabilidade Social
33. Iepé - Instituto de Pesquisa e Formação Indígena
34. Instituto de Defesa do Direito de Defesa - IDDD
35. Instituto de Estudos Socioeconômicos - Inesc
36. Instituto de Pesquisa Ambiental da Amazônia - Ipam
37. Instituto Democracia e Sustentabilidade - IDS
38. Instituto Fé, Paz e Clima
39. Instituto Global Attitude
40. Instituto Humanista para Cooperação e Desenvolvimento - Hivos
41. Instituto Igarapé
42. Instituto Internacional ARAYARA

43. Instituto Internacional de Educação do Brasil
44. Instituto MIRA-SERRA
45. Instituto Pro Bono
46. Instituto Socioambiental - ISA
47. Instituto Sou da Paz
48. Instituto Talanoa
49. Mapa Educação
50. Mater Natura - Instituto de Estudos Ambientais
51. Observatório do Carvão Mineral
52. Observatório do Clima
53. Observatório do Código Florestal
54. Observatório do Petróleo e Gás
55. Organização De Desenvolvimento Sustentável - ODS
56. Organização dos Professores Indígenas do Acre (OPIAC)
57. ponteAponte
58. Plataforma dos Movimentos Sociais pela Reforma do Sistema Político
59. Processo de Articulação e Diálogo, PAD
60. Projeto Saúde e Alegria
61. Rede Conhecimento Social
62. Rede das Organizações Não Governamentais da Mata Atlântica - RMA
63. Rede de Cooperação Amazônica - RCA
64. Rede Justiça Criminal
65. SAVE Brasil - Sociedade para a Conservação das Aves do Brasil
66. Terra de Direitos
67. Toxisphera Associação de Saúde Ambiental
68. Transparência Brasil
69. Transparência Capixaba
70. Uneafro Brasil
71. WWF Brasil
72. 350.org Brasil
73. Fórum Brasileiro de ONGs e Movimentos Sociais para o Meio Ambiente e o Desenvolvimento- FBOMS