

## Destruction advances along the Xingu River

*Company announces environmental license for the largest gold mine in Brazil before the government of Pará formalizes measure. The project is an environmental time bomb located adjacent to the Belo Monte Dam*

The Canadian company Belo Sun announced yesterday (Feb. 2) the concession of the installation license for the Volta Grande de Mineração project, located adjacent to the Belo Monte hydroelectric plant, in the city of Senador José Porfírio (Pará state), before the government of Pará formalized the approval. The mining company published a press **release** in English with the news before the end of the meeting of the State Secretariat of the Environment (Semas), which was discussing the authorization. The government of Pará is headed by Simão Jatene (PSDB).

Around 5 PM, ISA reporters gained access to the company's press release. Shortly thereafter, a press officer for Semas denied the information. The license was only confirmed on the **site of the secretariat** that night, hours later.

"The fact that the company had announced that it had been issued the license even before the decision had been formalized and published by the environmental agency responsible shows how the licensing of the enterprise was handled, with complete disrespect for procedures, without transparency, and with careless and negligent disregard for the lives of people who live in the Volta Grande do Xingu," criticized Adriana Ramos, coordinator of Policy and Legal Matters at ISA.

Expected to be the largest open-pit gold mine in Brazil, the enterprise is an environmental time bomb, with the potential to cause a tragedy of the dimensions of the dam burst in Mariana (MG), at the end of 2015. The area planned for the mine is already being seriously impacted by the hydroelectric plant: a decrease of over 80% in the flow of water along 100 km of the Xingu River will kill fish, reduce water quality and drastically change the way of life of indigenous and riverside populations.

According to the environmental impact study submitted to Semas, the mining project will leave behind giant mountains of waste, approximately twice the volume of the Sugarloaf Mountain and a reservoir for waste that is even

more toxic than that released during the disaster in Minas Gerais. The mine's environmental viability study was drafted by the same engineer indicted for homicide for the dam burst in Mariana. [Learn more.](#)

The license runs roughshod over the opinion of the National Indian Foundation (Funai), which has asked for a review of the studies regarding the indigenous component, since it believes that the version presented by Belo Sun is insufficient to evaluate the impact of the enterprise on the people who live there.

"In opposition to motions made by public institutions responsible for indigenous populations, again these vulnerable peoples are being left in a delicate situation regarding the impacts of a project like this, just as occurred with Belo Monte," emphasizes André Villas-Bôas, executive secretary of ISA.

The Federal Public Defenders' Office (DPU) and the Public Defenders' Office of Pará have lodged two lawsuits to revoke the license. The Federal Prosecutors' Office (MPF) sent a [recommendation](#) against the measure to the Environmental Secretariat of Pará. The MPF had already launched two other actions against the enterprise.

### **Consultation of indigenous people**

Ben Hur Daniel da Cunha, a federal public defender, explains that the license can be suspended until studies are conducted on the indigenous component. "The procedure that requires the prior drafting of environmental impact studies, in this case impacts on the indigenous population, was not followed. This decision prevents these communities from exercising a basic right, which is to participate in decisions that affect their lives," he stresses. The request from the DPU requires a response from the government of Pará and Belo Sun by Wednesday, Feb. 8.

The indigenous communities directly affected were not consulted about the project, as laid out in Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization (ILO), ratified by Brazil. Nevertheless, a note from the company, published this Thursday, expressed "appreciation for the support of the project by state and municipal governments and the local communities."

In April 2016, Semas scheduled a ceremony to announce the awarding of the license, but changed their mind after negative repercussions. Some months later, a UN report on

indigenous peoples in Brazil denounced the situation. “A license was issued by the government of Pará for the Belo Sun mining project, which is located adjacent to the Belo Monte Hydroelectric Plant and directly affects the community of the Juruna. This occurred in the absence of a consultation to obtain free, prior and informed consent from the indigenous peoples involved and without performing a necessary and urgent study on the cumulative environmental, social and human rights impacts. The potential impacts are a subject of serious concern,” wrote UN special rapporteur Victoria Tauli-Corpuz ([read more](#)).

One of the conditions for the concession of the environmental license to Belo Monte was the monitoring for six years of the stretch of reduced flow on the Xingu River, since the studies were unable to predict with certainty the socioenvironmental impacts of the project on the area. A new enterprise of this size could not, therefore, be built in the region before this period ends.

In May of last year, the secretary of the environment of Pará, Luís Fernandes Rocha, promised to conduct studies on the cumulative and synergistic impacts of the two large projects before making any decision about the license. Prosecutors, public defenders, environmentalists, and indigenous and riverside population organizations demand that, in addition to an assessment of these impacts, a socioenvironmental plan that ensures adequate living conditions for the local populations be presented by the state administration.

### **The “Volta Grande” project**

The mining company intends to build the project 9.5 km from the [Paquiçamba Indigenous Lands](#), 13.7 km from the [Arara da Volta Grande do Xingu Indigenous Lands](#) and near the [Ituna/Itatá Indigenous Lands](#), inhabited by isolated indigenous peoples ([learn more](#)).

The mine is located near Vila da Ressaca, a community of 300 families who depend on farming, fishing and small-scale mining to survive. If the “Volta Grande” project goes ahead, they will have to be resettled.

In 12 years, it is estimated that 600 tons of gold will be extracted from the mine. At the end of the mining activities, two giant heaps of chemically active sterile waste, covering an area of 346 hectares and containing 504 million tons of rock, will remain, with no plans for removal.

Photo caption: Bye Bye Xingu Canoe Trip organized by ISA surveyed the Volta Grande do Xingu in 2016 | Lilo Clareto