



**INDIGENOUS ASSEMBLY DRAWS UP PROPOSAL
FOR THE STATUTE OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES**

On Wednesday 18 April, leaders from all over the country brought to a close the Assembly of Indigenous Peoples held in Luziânia in the State of Goiás and attended by 176 indigenous people from 77 communities spread over 21 states. The final document was read to close the encounter, the purpose of which was to evaluate the progress made and difficulties faced by the indigenous movement and to build a consensus with regard to proposals for the Statute of Indigenous Peoples. The proposal, drawn up in the form of a bill discussed and voted on point by point, was delivered to parliamentary members in the National Congress during the indigenous mobilization in Brasília. This was the first national gathering of leaders since the Indigenous March and Conference and the police violence registered in Bahia. The final document of the encounter highlights the positive advance of the indigenous struggle to reclaim land and the resurging of indigenous groups.

The Assembly was very satisfied to register the participation of young indigenous leaders who pledged to follow through on the struggle for public policies to improve the living conditions of indigenous peoples. Nevertheless, the leaders complain about the difficulties created by the federal government in meeting their claims and the precarious dialogue between the National Congress and indigenous peoples. "For us, these difficulties become major challenges to be faced and overcome. Holding this Assembly is yet another effort on the part of our communities, peoples and organizations to face these challenges."

Discussion of the Statute of Indigenous Peoples took up two days of intense work, formulating proposals and definitions on polemical themes such as mining and timber exploitation on indigenous lands, State assistance in education and health, demarcation of lands, penal rules and other matters. The objective was to produce a Statute in harmony with the Federal Constitution enacted in 1988. The discussions were not new: since 1992 the indigenous peoples have promoted meetings, seminars and assemblies to study proposals for the new Statute. The Statute of Indigenous Peoples in effect is Law 6001, which dates from 1973 and is lagging vis-à-vis the Federal Constitution.

During the mobilization, when the indigenous leaders were received in a special audience in the House of Representatives, a document was handed to the President of the House, federal representative Aécio Neves (PSDB-MG), expressing discontent at the government's proposal as presented last December by representative Luciano Pizzato (PFL-PR).

On 19 April, the Indian Day, demonstrations began with a public act held in Compromisso Square where the Pataxó Hã-Hã-Hãe Galdino Jesus dos Santos was burned alive by five middle-class Brasília adolescents. Minervina de Jesus, Galdino's mother, took part in the ceremony and spoke with emotion of the fourth anniversary of her son's death. The Square was transformed into a stage for the rituals of the various indigenous groups attending the act.

The leaders followed their march as far as the National Congress, where other rituals were presented. In the afternoon they were received in a special plenary session held in the House of Representatives, promoted the launching of the memorial book on the Indigenous March and Conference and the Indigenous Pre-Conference. That afternoon, in Três Poderes Square, they awaited the official delivery of 8,000 postcards collected in Holland as a campaign in favor of demarcation of indigenous lands. At the end of the mobilization, all the indigenous groups returned to their own villages.

Brasília, 19 April 2001.
Indianist Missionary Council – Cimi