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Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance

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Ref. Brazilian Black Coalition for Rights (Coalizão Negra por Direitos do Brasil) contribution for 2022 report on climate and racial justice to the General Assembly

Black Coalition for Rights (Coalizão Negra por Direitos), an articulation with more than 250 organizations of the Brazilian black movement, present this document to the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, in response to an open call, with contributions on the situation of environmental racism in Brazil to be considered by the Rapporteur in the report on climate change and racial justice that will be present at the UN General Assembly.

In Brazil, the organizations of the Black Coalition for Rights had a struggle for recognition by the authorities of the environmental racism that prevails in the country. The tragic impacts derived from climate change have increased the precariousness of life for the black Brazilian population, which is already systematically victimized by the necropolitics applied to this population in Brazil. Several tragedies related to climate changes have occurred throughout the country, affecting black and poor communities in the cities, but also in the fields, forests and quilombola communities, most of all at places where the majority of the population is composed of black people. These impacts of climate changes are the result of the absence of effective public policies to manage the changes that are taking place in nature, in order to protect the



black Brazilian population; what is observed is an aggravation of the situation of poverty and the precariousness of the living conditions of this population. These policies should be the responsibility of local and Federal Governments.

Situations and examples of environmental racism that we have historically denounced by black social movements, increased in recent years: Large enterprises are implemented in areas inhabited by quilombolas and other populations with a black and indigenous majority; disasters in urban areas with landslides and floods; drought situations in various regions of the country; the large garbage dumps in urban and rural areas inhabited by vulnerable populations (mostly black); the criminalization of populations that live off extractivism and artisanal fishing.

Humanity is facing one of the greatest challenges of the last century. The white man has placed himself at the center of relations with Nature and production, now it is time to rethink this posture and build other ways of relating to the world and our environment. Debates on sustainability and climate change have disregarded experiences to which racialized populations are subjected, in the name of a development that excludes them from any benefits and protection mechanisms, leaving them exposed to the serious consequences of socio-environmental degradation. We continue to affirmate the obvious for people that suffer the consequences of racism. It is not the rain that kills the poorest population, it is the lack of investment in adequate public policies, which intersects with the consequences of a predatory, ultra-neoliberal, segregating and excluding development model.

The Conference of Parties of the United Nations, known as COP, for example, represents an important arena for discussions about what countries intend to do to stop the warming of Planet Earth, but it was only in the last COP26 that we had a significant number of black environmentalists coming from Brazil. There was a lack of space for participation and deliberation for organized civil society, especially black civil society. How do they intend to deal with the climate issue without incorporating into the processes those who still guard forests, protect biodiversity, and preserve traditional practices of relationships with nature, even though they are the ones who most directly suffer from the effects of climate change?

This document addressed to the Special Rapporteur presents some concrete situations of concern of Brazilian civil society in relation to the racial dimension of the impacts



of climate change in Brazil. Occurrences that characterize a systemic scenario of social ills to face environmental racism in our country.

- **Quilombola communities in Sapê do Norte**

In between the cities of Conceição da Barra and São Mateus, in the state of Espírito Santo, is the quilombola territory known as Sapê do Norte. The place concentrates communities that define themselves as quilombo remnants, 29 of which are certified by the Palmares Cultural Foundation - Brazilian public institution that certified “quilombos” as a territory to be protected¹.

Since the 1960s, the mostly black population that already resided in this territory and fought for the recognition of their titularity began to live with onslaughts of eucalyptus and sugarcane monoculture. Initially, the interest of large companies in land was intensified by the construction of the BR-101 highway (inaugurated in 1957). During the 1970s and 1980s, agribusiness attacks gained strength with Proálcool² and, in the mid-2000s, the territory became the scene of conflicts with the installation of a gas pipeline (Cacimba-Catu) by Petrobras (major Brazilian oil corporation).

In addition to disrespecting the history of land titularity, this process was responsible for large-scale deforestation, the drying up of streams and the filling of springs, the death of animals and the high dumping of pesticides in the water and soil. As a result, the quilombola population that resisted the violent process of land expropriation and managed to remain in Sapê do Norte began to live with a drastic reduction in biodiversity.

At last, it is interesting to report to the UN that the remaining black population of quilombos who remain fighting in this territory started to experience another layer of rights’ violation after the rupture of the “Fundão Dam”, operated by Samarco in Mariana/MG, on November 5th, 2015. Studies produced by the Rio Doce Task Force of the Federal Public Ministry indicate that, since the arrival of tailings mud in the coastal region of Espírito Santo, this population has lived with the presence of Potentially Toxic Elements in water and soil, which puts

¹ Information about titularity of quilombolas communities: <https://www.palmares.gov.br/?page_id=37551>.

² The National Alcohol Program was an initiative created by the civil-military government regime (1964-1981), responsible for encouraging the production of fuel from sugarcane.

at risk the continuity of their ways of living and their transmission to the next generations.

From that moment on, complaints about desertification, droughts and drying up of streams and springs - consequences of intense monoculture in the surroundings - were added to reports of material and immaterial damages and losses, including insecurity in access to sufficient drinking water, safe and acceptable for personal and domestic use, even when there are wells and waterholes. In addition, it is necessary to point out that the population of Sapê do Norte continues to fight to be recognized as affected by the Samarco disaster and guarantee its proper repair, a fact that did not occur even after more than 6 years of the disaster.

The situation described above is responsible for aggravating the existing vulnerability in the territory, besides the negative impact on the adaptation and permanence capacities of quilombola populations in the current context of climate emergency.

- **Landslide in Petrópolis - Floods at Minas Gerais and Bahia**

Only in these few months of 2022, Brazil has already accounted for more than 500 deaths from the impacts caused by heavy rains.³ The flooding and landslides on slopes, at the beginning of 2022 in the Southeast region - Minas Gerais, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro - and in the Southeast of Bahia, opened wide the urban policy that puts black people in conditions of subordination and, consequently, at risk, because the safest regions were not made for them to inhabit. Why is there a greater number of cases of floods, landslides and river overflows in poor areas of Greater São Paulo, such as in the cities of Embu das Artes, Francisco Morato and Franco da Rocha, and not in neighborhoods like noble neighborhood as Perdizes, in the capital paulista?

The occupation of steep terrain is not synonymous with disasters. In cities like the capital of São Paulo, the hills were occupied by the elites. The fragility of topographic conditions were mitigated by public and private investments in infrastructure. The lack of urban infrastructure for the safe permanence of

³<https://climainfo.org.br/2022/05/31/brasil-soma-mais-de-500-mortes-com-fortes-chuvas-desde-dezembro>



housing in hilly areas is a product of the logic that transforms the basic human need to live into a commodity. In this sense, these risk situations do not arise only because of a presumptuous lack of planning, but also as a result of the housing policy intended for this black and poor population.

- **Floods and landslides in the Brazilian Northeast, especially in Pernambuco**

The high rate of precipitation in the Northeast region at the end of May 2022 was considered an atypical event for the rainy season due to the encounter of the Eastern Wave Disturbances and a cold front air mass coming from the south of the country. However, it is noteworthy that these types of climatic events are expected by the effect of climate change announced by researchers from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

The certainty of periods of rain is the death of black and peripheral people. This certainty is related to the lack of long-term urban planning in cities, which has deepened social and environmental inequalities, especially for low-income, black and indigenous populations in this country. Recife, for example, has a history of tragedies related to high rainfall: 1975, 1986, 1990 and 2010 (with floods in 41 municipalities in the Mata Sul zone).

Therefore, having the black population's living conditions vulnerable in a scenario of climate change, they are the first to die as a result of the climate changes. In the metropolitan region of Recife, in the state of Pernambuco, the population came together to look for their families among the rubble of landslides. More than 120 people died in this situation. In the state of Alagoas, three deaths were confirmed and more than 7,500 people affected by the heavy rains.

In Sergipe, the Civil Defense was called out by the occurrence of landslides, by the risk of landslides in other areas and by several points of flooding in the capital Aracaju. In Paraíba, residents had to travel using canoes because the streets in the center of the metropolitan region of João Pessoa were flooded.

The loss of the only material conquerors and the security of a roof to inhabit is an irreversible damage in many families. Most impoverished racialized

population living in large cities is pushed to regions of greater environmental fragility, therefore, of less economic interest for the real estate market. No housing policies, no basic infrastructure, no sanitation, no adaptation and disaster prevention plans. This political-social structure that pushes the racialized population towards living conditions of great socio-environmental vulnerability, at the same time that they do not receive adequate public policies to face the precarious living conditions, are the ways in which environmental racism is structured in Brazil.

- **Threats to environmentalists who defend their territories**

Brazil is the fourth country in the world that kills more environmentalists, according to a report by the NGO Global Witness. Traditional peoples, quilombola, riverine and indigenous communities suffer constant pressure from various economic activities in their territories, being threatened or cruelly assassinated⁴.

In January 2022, a family of environmentalists in the rural area of São Félix do Xingu, in Pará, were found dead. José Gomes, Marcia Nunes Lisboa and Joene - father, mother and daughter, respectively, had a project to release turtles in the Xingu River. José Gomes, known as Zé do Lago, and Márcia lived in the locality for more than 20 years and were known for their project to preserve turtles and tracajás (chelonians) and other environmental protection activities in the region. The case was investigated and has been reported as a commissioned murder, as well as that of Chico Mendes, in 1988, and the rubber tapper couple Maria and Zé Claudio, in 2011. All these cases were concentrated in Pará, in regions with accentuated environmental conflicts, and all the victims were black women who fought for a balanced way of life with forest conservation.

In Salvador, Bahia, shellfish gatherer Eliete Paraguassu, a black woman, quilombola and community leader from Ilha de Maré, has been constantly threatened for defending better living and health conditions for the quilombola people of Ilha de Maré, and for denouncing great enterprises that are installed

⁴ <https://conexaoplaneta.com.br/blog/familia-de-ambientalistas-e-assassinada-no-para-pai-mae-e-filha-tinham-projeto-de-soltura-de-quelonios-no-rio-xingu/>

and contaminate the waters. Eliete has been working since the 1990s to denounce environmental racism and for the right of its people to remain in the territory, which has been pressured and impacted by petrochemical industries located close to the region, such as the Aratu Industrial Complex (CIA), the Camaçari (Copec), and through the Port of Aratu-Candeias, where 60% of the sea cargo in the State of Bahia circulates. “The population of Ilha da Maré is the sacrifice of the State's development. We are talking about a people who have their bodies as a sacrifice zone, but also have their bodies as a buffer zone for these undertakings”, said Eliete Paraguassu in an interview.

- **Expansion of the Alcântara Space Base and the threat to quilombola territories - Maranhão/ Brazil⁵**

Alcântara Launch Center, in Maranhão, was built in the 1980s over the largest quilombola territory in Brazil, compulsorily removing 312 families. Located in the Maranhense Amazon, the relocated families were part of 32 quilombola communities, out of the almost 200 that exist in the municipality. Alcântara is the municipality that has the largest number of quilombola communities in the country – there are more than 3,300 families, or about 22,000 people.

During the last 40 years, there have been three attempts to launch the Satellite Launch Vehicle (VLS). All failed – the last, in August 2003, killed 21 people in an explosion still on the ground. Three failed attempts, millions of dollars invested, and Brazil is not among the countries that have the launch vehicle technology.

In April 2021, the far-right government of Jair Bolsonaro presented the names of four companies, selected in a bidding process, to use the base commercially. There were three Americans and one Canadian, and it provided for the expansion of the base by another 12,000 hectares. This would mean the displacement of more quilombola communities. On the other hand, the land titling process has not advanced for 13 years.

⁵ <https://www.nationalgeographicbrasil.com/historia/2021/07/ampliacao-de-base-espacial-da-ditadura-ameaca-repetir-despejo-de-quilombolas>
<https://apublica.org/2022/01/caso-de-quilombolas-afetados-por-base-de-alcantara-chega-a-corte-interamericana/>



In January 2022, after 20 years of processing in the Inter-American System for the Protection of Human Rights (OAS), the case was sent to trial by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights for human rights violations against the quilombola communities of Alcântara.

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