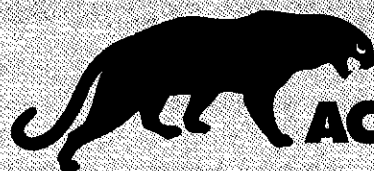


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**RAINFOREST
ACTION NETWORK**

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1996

Victory for the Macuxi People is Within Reach

BRAZIL'S FEDERAL GOVERNMENT is slowly moving forward in recognizing indigenous land rights. Last January the government enacted Decree #1775, a measure allowing commercial interests to challenge indigenous land title. Although the government has thrown out most of the challenges to Indian land filed under the decree, there are still eight territories under review. Nelson Jobim, Brazil's Minister of Justice, had announced he would make final rulings by October 10, 1996, but that day came and went with no resolution. Instead, Jobim visited the largest of the contested territories — Raposa Serra do Sol, in the rainforest state of Roraima — and postponed his decision.

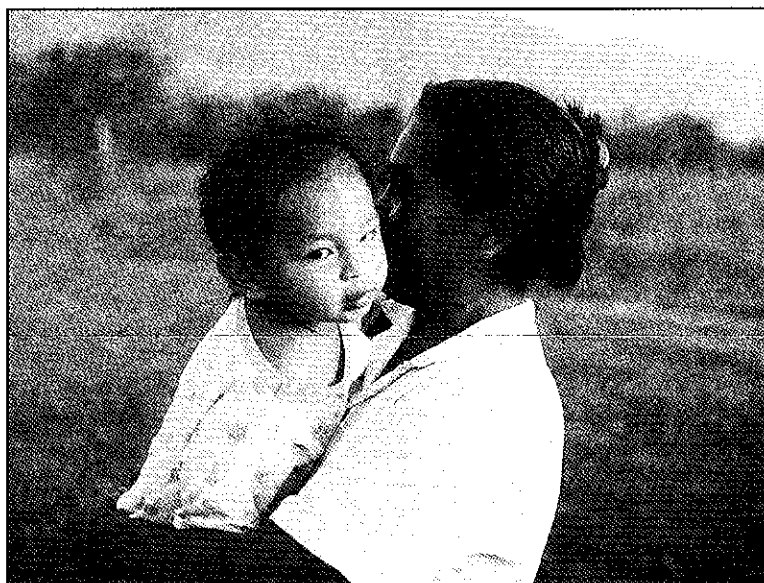
Raposa Serra do Sol covers over 4,150,000 acres of lush Amazon land, an area half the size of Connecticut. Many Indians make the region their home, including the Macuxi, Ingariko, Wapixana, Taurepang, and Patamona, who together make up one-third of Roraima's indigenous population. Roraima has a greater indigenous population than any other state in Brazil.

While visiting Raposa Serra do Sol Minister Jobim spoke with several indigenous groups, repeating President Fernando Henrique Cardoso's assurance that the government will formalize ancestral title to all 223-million acres that Brazil's Indians claim as traditional territory. This amounts to the government's setting aside nearly eleven per cent of the country's land mass as protected areas. Jobim, however, would not commit to when the government would enact these long-promised measures.

For over 20 years, the indigenous populations of Roraima have struggled to maintain control of their ancestral territories against encroachment by land-hungry cattle ranchers, and by gold and diamond miners. In many cases these commercial interests have used intimidation and violence to drive the Indians out of their resource-rich homelands. Since the early 1970s Roraima's population has increased five-fold, putting enormous strain on the region's forests and on the indigenous population. Adding to the difficulty, the regional government chartered a new township last year within the boundaries of Indian territory, and in early November Brazil's Supreme Court rejected the Indians' appeal against the township's creation.

Minister Jobim has offered no explanation for postponing his decision on Raposa Serra do Sol and the seven other areas challenged under Decree #1775. Local indigenous groups and human rights observers fear that his failure to act now may allow a window of opportunity for major financial interests to derail the establishment of indigenous land titles.

In October, seventeen U.S. Congressmen sent a letter to President Cardoso expressing concern over the potential reduction of indigenous lands. Signers included prominent members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee who had been blanketed with messages from RAN's activist web site (<http://www.ran.org>). In addition, RAN members sent hundreds of postcards and faxes to President Cardoso, urging him to do everything possible to secure protection for Indian lands and indigenous peoples. Let's make one last, big push!



This Macuxi mother and child may soon experience the joy and security of knowing their homeland will be theirs — forever. Thank you for helping make it possible! Photo: Robyn Kapp

WHAT YOU CAN DO

The future of the Macuxi and other tribes living in Raposa Serra do Sol, as well as all Brazilian Indians, is being decided now! Please tell Nelson Jobim, Brazil's Minister of Justice, that you support indigenous land rights. Postage from the U.S. is 60 cents. Here is a sample letter:

His Excellency, Sr. Nelson Jobim
Ministro da Justiça
Explanada dos Ministérios B1.T
Brasília, DF 70064-900 Brazil

Your Excellency,

I applaud your decision to recognize Indian title over traditional territories in Raposa Serra do Sol, and in the other areas challenged under Decree #1775. This is a crucial step in upholding indigenous rights and I urge you to act promptly. It is imperative that no further delays prevent these lands from being formally recognized as indigenous reserves.

The violence against the Macuxi and other tribes in Roraima has gone on too long and must be stopped! The future of Brazil's priceless heritage, and of these ancient cultures, lies in your hands.