

# INDIAN WARRIORS: FROM WARCLUB TO PAPER

*Geraldo Mosimann da Silva e Simone F. de Athayde*

<http://www.socioambiental.org/website/parabolicas/english/backissu/47/articles/pg5.htm>



Kaiabi warriors with fishermen  
on release day.

*Simone F. de Athayde / ISA*

On October 31 last, Kaiabi leaders surprised eight fishermen in the Arraias river, in the Northwest part of the Xingu Indigenous Park (PIX), in Mato Grosso. The Indians lost their patience, apprehended the invaders, and took them to the Diauarum Indigenous Station. That was the start of the Fishermen's War, which entailed political, social and ethnical conquests. It also means the massive presence of warriors from the Northern peoples of the Park, besides leaders of Southern ethnicities who live in

the South, and linked to the so-called Upper Xingu Cultural Complex.

The episode intensified the feeling of identity of 1,000 Kaiabi, Yudja and Suya Indians who live North of the PIX. This ethnical revitalization process is linked to the strengthening of the Xingu Indigenous Land Association (ATIX) as a representative body of the Xingu peoples for interlocution with non-Indians. Created in 1995, ATIX counts on a political council made of members from 12 ethnicities among the 14 existing in the PIX.

In the daily conversations which beaoned their negotiations with FUNAI, the Indians debated the Park's territory management ad nauseam. It was an exercise of warring strength and ethnical price, punctuated by singing and dancing, where body painting, dressing, adornments, headdresses and warclubs were the rule. Women also surprised: normally relegated to political passivity, they participated with vehement manifestations for the defense of the Park limits. Taking the opportunity, they claimed from male leaders space in the discussions which are germane to the interests of their peoples.

In the fourth day following the fracas with the fishermen, the leaders released the two minors of the group; however, the Indians continued demanding the presence of FUNAI's president and representatives from IBAMA, the Federal Police, the Office of the Prosecution, the Interinstitutional Environmental Monitoring Committee (CIFA/MT), city administrations of the buffer zone and the national media, to present their claims. On

November 7, a cable officially communicated that FUNAI's president agreed to meet with them. Thus, in a memorable poly-ethnic feast held on the 8th, the remainders of the group were handed over to FUNAI to be ousted from the Park.

On the 13th and 14th the Indians met with the authorities, which also counted with representatives from the Agri-environmental Development Program of Mato Grosso (PRODEAGRO) and Instituto Socioambiental. From the delivery of a document containing claims related to the structure and operation of PIX's monitoring system, the meeting ended with the signature of a Commitment Statement by the institutions present, which pledged to seek ways to make feasible the contribution of funds and services necessary to implement what has been decided. A highlight was FUNAI's historical decision to enter an operational agreement with ATIX (signed as of November 11), to pass on through R\$40,000 per annum to structure Indigenous Monitoring Stations, hiring personnel and revive limits.

## **HIGH MORALE**

The other side of the results was the moral effect triggered inside the PIX. The Indians, albeit suspicious because of unfulfilled promises, feel a bit more reassured and happy.

The treatment metered out to fishermen and authorities at the Diauarum was exemplary to all of us, used to watch fist-fight political debates in parliament. However, the main learning from this conflict certainly was the perception and attitudes coherent with the change in the Indian – non-Indian relations paradigm.

In older days, the Kaiabi manifested their warrior identity as the central ritual of Yawosi Ceremony, when their victories were celebrated in feasts when trophies were the heads of their enemies. Despite the anguish for no longer celebrating their traditions, they're fighting another kind of war these days, said they. The true warrior is not the one who beheads his enemy and brings the trophy to the village dance, but the one who can handle paper. Still carrying their big sticks, the winner is the one who can handle paper.

The Indians' tenacity and the stance of the institutions will pinpoint which will be the battles to be fought and, from amidst feasting and fighting, what will transpire from the papers signed to the daily reality of the first dwellers of these woods and rivers.



Geraldo Mosimann da Silva e Simone F. de Athayde

## **PARK PESTERED BY INTRUDERS**

*The Xingu Park was officially created in 1961, in a transitional environment midway between cerrado and the Amazon forest. By the time of demarcation, headsprings of the rivers which form the Xingu watershed were excluded from its limits, which entailed a growing concern on the part of Indians and environmentalists alike. The Park, with 2.8 million hectares, is a green island amidst the deforestation arc in the state of Mato Grosso which due to the predatory, impacting nature of regional occupation by loggers, cattle ranchers and urban nuclei.*

*For several years already, PIX has been the object of intruding by fishermen, poachers and has been under heavy pressure for timber harvesting and extraction of other products, including phytotherapy products. However, the monitoring and enforcing activities of the limits outside the area have always been disregarded by the authorities. Even so, ten monitoring stations were installed, six of them counting on voluntary indigenous work forces; all of them are operating under precarious conditions. In the past few years monitoring and enforcement actions have been developed. However, from the occupation regional fronts, there have been constant attempts at alluring and seducing the Indians to authorize the entry of strangers and the enjoyment of whatever PIX has to offer.*