

Brazil govt backs natives on land demarcation

October 5 2013



Brazilian natives demonstrate in front of the National Congress in Brasilia on October 3, 2013

Brazilian authorities on Friday sided with protesting natives and slammed as unconstitutional an amendment that would give lawmakers authority to approve and demarcate indigenous lands.

Hundreds of indigenous militants have flocked to Brasilia over the past

few days to protest the amendment, which critics say has been designed to benefit a powerful pro-agribusiness bloc in Congress.

The main target of ire is PEC 215, a constitutional reform that would transfer from the executive branch to Congress the authority to approve and demarcate native lands and environmental conservation parks.

The Justice Ministry forwarded a legal finding to the House of Deputies, railing against the amendment.

"We believe this measure is not only ill-timed and inappropriate but also unconstitutional," said Justice Minister Jose Eduardo Cardozo.

Indigenous activists, however, still insist that President Dilma Rousseff's government is flouting their rights.

Roughly 12 percent of Brazil's territory is currently recognized as indigenous territories. Native Indians grouped in 305 tribes represent less than 0.5 percent of the more than 200 million Brazilians.

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