

Brazil's natives protest dam construction

11 June 2013



A Brazilian Munduruku native attends a rally in front of the headquarters of the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI) in Brasilia, on June 11, 2013. Indigenous activists occupied the headquarters of the government agency Tuesday to demand a voice in the construction of a controversial dam in the Amazon.

Indigenous activists occupied the headquarters of a government agency Tuesday to demand a voice in the construction of a controversial dam in the Amazon.

The natives arrived in the capital Brasilia a week ago for talks with [federal authorities](#) after occupying one of the Belo Monte dam's building sites.

Unhappy with the outcome, about 150 activists invaded the headquarters of the National Indian Foundation (Funai), the federal agency handling indigenous affairs, late Monday.

"We want respect for the constitution in which the indigenous rights are clearly spelled out," chief Valdenir Munduruku told AFP.

"The government is putting forward various decrees, which flout our rights over our lands with the creation of dams," he added. "We want prior

consultation over all these dams."

Armed with bows, arrows and spears, and donning face paint, feathers and straw garb, the indigenous Munduruku, Arara, Kaiapo and Xipaia—including women and children—came from the northern state of Para.

"Respect our rights," proclaimed a huge banner on the agency's gate.

Belo Monte, a \$13 billion project aiming to produce 11,000 megawatts of electricity, is expected to flood a 500-square-kilometer (200-square-mile) area along the Xingu River, displacing 16,000 people, according to the government.

It would be the third-biggest dam in the world, after China's Three Gorges and Brazil's Itaipu in the south.

[Indigenous groups](#) say it will harm their way of life while environmentalists have warned of deforestation, [greenhouse gas emissions](#) and [irreparable damage](#) to the ecosystem.

Amid bitter land feuds with white ranchers, the protesters are also railing against bills that would affect recognition of native lands and authorize mining on them.

Indigenous peoples represent less than one percent of Brazil's 194 million people.

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