

Farewell to Bruno and Dom, with Great Sorrow, Sadness, and Indignation

On June 5, federal employee and indigenist Bruno da Cunha Araújo Pereira and British journalist Dom Phillips should have arrived in Atalaia do Norte, Amazonas, by boat. They never did. For eleven days Brazil and the world watched films of the rivers and forests of the Vale do Javari region, its colors, its people, and the tireless efforts of the Indigenous in search of their friend Bruno, and his companion Dom, while authorities affirmed that it was “a completely wild area,” “hostile,” or “of difficult access.”

During this time of waiting and anguish, the Brazilian and international media taught us a bit more about the work of Bruno and his associates with the Indigenous peoples of the region. We discovered that Dom sought to learn about, and let the world know about, life there, its exuberance, and the threats to its future. We thus discovered more about a region that, far from being wild, is truly threatened, unprotected, and intensely ravaged by barbarity. We saw the commitment of the Indigenous peoples to these searches. We also observed the camaraderie and collaboration that the two had with these people, in defense of their lands and lives.

It was shocking to see through the news how the situation of these peoples has been aggravated by the dismantling of the institution that should be protecting them, the National Indian Foundation – FUNAI. The disregard and complacency of the authorities over the grave situation of these peoples became more visible worldwide. Unfortunately, the problem goes far beyond the Vale do Javari. The burning of the forests, the expulsions, and the murders continue without those responsible being held accountable. In addition, insinuations about, and blame for, the victims is constant. Even this week, disturbing challenges were made about the legality of Bruno’s and Dom’s presence in the region, in flagrant disrespect of their family and friends deeply anguished by their loss.

On Wednesday June 15, unfortunately, the little hope of finding them alive disappeared. Two more murders of defenders of the Amazon and its Indigenous peoples were confirmed, with a perverse hiding of their bodies.

In fact, Brazil and the world became more aware of the destruction, illegalities, and atrocities practiced against the environment and its inhabitants. And, as Brazil and the world waited for news of the victims, they learned about callousness—especially how the callousness towards the original Amazonian peoples and those who genuinely defend them operates. It is not a coincidence that it was the Indigenous who, despite pain and risk, found the most important clues that led to Bruno’s and Dom’s belongings, something essential to shedding light on the case.

Confirmation of a tragedy foretold and denounced by the Indigenous and Bruno himself leads us to demand forcefully that the authorities conduct a thorough investigation of all those involved in the crime, and particularly those who may have ordered it.

Here are key questions we ask and need answered: Who ordered Bruno and Dom’s death? Who wanted them killed? How can guarantees be found to ensure that the Indigenous peoples of the region are able to continue to live in the region? And what will be done with the denunciations Bruno and the Union of Indigenous Peoples of the Vale do Javari (UNIVAJA) took to the authorities?

We join the entities, associations, and individuals who defend the Indigenous people in demanding justice for Bruno and Dom, and in seeking an effective reversal of the current policy of devastation of the Amazon.

The painful loss of their companions, family, and friends moves us to bow in respect and solidarity, to acknowledge their suffering. We express our support and special appreciation for the opportunity to have benefited from the professionalism, dedication, and good work that Bruno and Dom practiced and promoted in life, even globally. We commit ourselves to continue to work jointly for the ideals that both professed, for justice, equity, and peace in our country: Justice for Bruno and Dom; Protection for the Indigenous Peoples of the Amazon; and an end to destruction of the Amazon.

As Bruno's companion, Beatriz de Almeida Matos, who is our colleague on the Commission of Indigenous Affairs of the Brazilian Anthropology Association, declared: "Now that Bruno's spirits are passing through the forest and spread upon us, our strength is even greater."

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