

# “Relatório sementes” – Report “sementes” (seeds) 2021

## Situation of human rights advocates in brazil

Testimonies of experiences  
coping with Covid-19



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## Situation of human rights advocates in Brazil

Testimonies of experiences coping with Covid-19

### Project Seeds of Protection (“Sementes de Proteção”) for Human Rights Advocates

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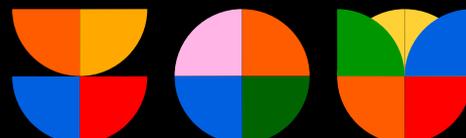


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# Introduction



**Memory of a time  
Where to fight for your right  
It's a killing fault  
There are so many inglorious fights  
There are stories that history  
Someday will tell  
Of obscure characters  
The passages, the courage  
Are seeds scattered on this ground  
[...]**

**They are lives that feed  
our fire of hope  
The battle scream  
Whoever waits, never reaches**

(Gonzaguinha, “Pequena Memória para um Tempo sem Memória”, 1973)

**The Report Sementes 2021 on the situation of human rights advocates in Brazil: testimonies of the experience coping with Covid-19** is a joint initiative of several organizations and movements that come together in the Project Sementes de Proteção (Seeds of Protection) for Human Rights Advocates.

It aims to give visibility to the work of human rights advocates, the risks and possibilities, in order to strengthen their performance and collaborate to the advancement of the fight and the human rights cause. In its first edition, of three annual ones, it focuses on recording the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the lives of human rights advocates from various fronts of action.

Through structured interviews with activists from the most diverse human rights organizations operating in Brazil, the report gathers testimonies of memories and narratives of these advocates.

The interviews were carried out in December/2021 and January/2022 through digital platforms, all recorded and systematized.

**The questions asked to each participant were the following:**

- 1.** make a brief self-presentation indicating your main actions in the fight for human rights and their binding;
- 2.** how do you assess the struggle of resistance and the confrontation of human rights violations in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?;

3. how do you evaluate the struggles for the promotion and achievement of human rights in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?;

4. in your particular point of view, what are the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the work of human rights advocates?; and

5. what strategies would you suggest to strengthen networking and carry out popular protection of human rights advocates considering the after-Covid-19 pandemic reality?

**We believe that memory is one of the most important practices for building bonds,** for cultivating affection and, especially, for supporting the formulation of the truths that gain social and cultural meaning.

No society lives without permanently making the memory of its experiences so that they are transformed into meaningful experiences – in the words of master Paulo Freire, inspired by Camões, of **“knowing about built experiences”**, that which is loaded with first-hand experience.

The Covid-19 pandemic profoundly marked the lives and activities of human rights advocates, an event open to the most diverse meanings, but which only consolidates as a learning experience to the extent that each one of those who lived it personally exercises the right to say **“their own words”**, as Ernani Fiori stated in the preface to Pedagogy of the Oppressed (“Pedagogia do Oprimido”). It is in this sense that this Report proposes itself, somehow, to be a space for this exercise to be carried out. Not all the voices are present, but the voices participating are significant. They do not represent or replace all the others, but are added up in a large circle of dialogue. They are one more – and each – word in this circle.

We also believe that memory feeds the realization of testimonial justice and epistemic justice, the one that recognizes and values each knowledge, the various ones.

In this way, it contributes to not reinforcing injustice, revictimization, directly opposing all the **“epistemicides”**, which are part of the genocides.

Those who were victims of Covid-19, who continue to be victims of human rights violations, those who are still being prevented from fighting for their rights because the owners of power and money continue to understand that fighting for rights is a **“killing fault”**, they raise their voice.

They do an echo that does not end in what is said, as they carry much more to say. The suffering experienced is transformed into nourishment for the struggle. Grief turns into fight. The sadness of death becomes the joy of continuing to hope. The necessity becomes solidarity.

In short, life, above all, gains strength and reaffirms itself, all injustices, all violence and violations are denounced, a demand for accountability, compensation, for continue to believe that the effective accomplishment of the human rights it is in the promotion and protection of the life of each single person. This is what all the voices registered in this report say, in many different ways.

Against all the obscurantism of denialism and all the cruelty of the attacks and depreciation of the actions of human rights advocates, each one, in their own way, add up to the appeal of Maya Angelou: **“even so, I stand up”**.

In the testimonies witnessed by each participant of this work, in which each and every one is the author not only of what they said, but of what is reported in what was said, expression of the collective work of the organizations and movements they represent, it is the power that doesn't surrender and doesn't let itself be defeated, even during the dark night. This is because they continue to believe together with Thiago de Melo that **“it is dark, but I sing, because dawn will come”**.

**The record that this report brings to light carries out desires wanting to produce many new cycles**, of all kinds, affecting those who place themselves in the daily routine of the fights and people's causes and those who, even if not engaged, can contribute to these fights, turning human rights into the reason to proceed, aware that the achievements of each day, the small victories of each moment, the current combats and those from forever, are not the final goal or even the purpose that sets them on the move. What creates the movement is the ability to hope while trailing

the way, that kind of hope which does not run away from the crossroads, not even from contradictions, on the contrary, it finds them as a search for the permanent completion of a well-lived life.

It is not about reproducing great narratives, it is about collecting the quotes, the flashes, sometimes flickering, of the “little fires”, the most diverse, that Galeano tells us about, which together, each one **“with its own light among all the others”**, spread the lovingness that feeds the will to fight for human rights spreads.

Neither the worst moment, nor the biggest setback, nor the strongest attack, nor the worst amongst the rulers, nor the cruellest pandemic, nothing stops this demanding collective exercise of humanization - which learned long ago that there is no human life without all lives being taken care of, with the same care; being protected, with the same protection.

The various voices that gather here reiterate that fighting for human rights is always demanding justice, accountability, reparation; but it is also to make the courageous and permanent promotion of all rights for all people and, mandatorily, to protect the rights of those who have a more precarious life and, therefore, subjects in need of care.

**Facing all the threats to life that come from “hatred lovers”, the expropriators, the exploiters, the misogynists, the racists, the totalitarians is what is always on the fight agenda.  
¡No pasarán!  
(They shall not succeed!)**

Thus, our clamour is also:

**¡Viva la vida! (Cheers for life!)  
Ever. It is for it that we will  
continue to be encouraged and  
keep encouraging.**

**May this material help us in this  
joint effort so that there may be  
life always and in abundance! We  
will continue to be seeds, we will  
continue to sow, we will  
continue to cultivate.**

**Brazil, February 2022.  
General Coordination of  
the Project Sementes**



# Experiences of coping with Covid-19 Memories and Narratives from Human Rights Advocates

The political conditions for the performance of human rights advocates have always been unfavourable, as Brazil is one of the countries that present the highest risks for the performance of this activity and the physical integrity of these workers.

In the last two years, this situation has been aggravated by the new coronavirus pandemic, which has brought a series of difficulties and challenges for the advocates to remain in the front line of defending and guaranteeing human rights.

It took a lot of courage, strength and creativity to deal with an already historic context of violations, combined with new situations, such as virtual activities, that faced the bad Internet availability in the country (especially in the most isolated regions), in the lack of adequate equipment, in the lack of resources to acquire them, and in the lack of experience to deal with these new tools.

The narratives presented here demonstrate the capacity of human rights fighters to adapt, without forgetting the ways of being and doing they have accumulated, resignifying them; facing the new without forgetting how it was; in facing different demands, but with the awareness that people's memory is an important tool for combat that rescues the practices of resistance developed in the communities, in the core of fights, in the organization of Brazilian civil society throughout history, and that all have collaborated to the accumulated achievements.

The narratives are from advocates who are in very different fields, during the Covid-19 pandemic in Brazil. They show the difficulties and violations faced, the hopes and the suggestions of strategies to strengthen the fight in defence of human rights in the country. The narratives are also a tribute to those who were on the front lines and lost their lives to Covid-19, and to all who stand. The protection of these fighters and the strengthening of their performance are essential for the advancement of the combat and the cause of human rights in our country.

The memories are presented in alphabetical order by the interviewee's first name and were collected in individual interviews, carried out through a virtual platform, between December 2021 and January 2022.

**Lucyvanda Moura**  
Consultant





# André Santos de Freitas

## Greenpeace



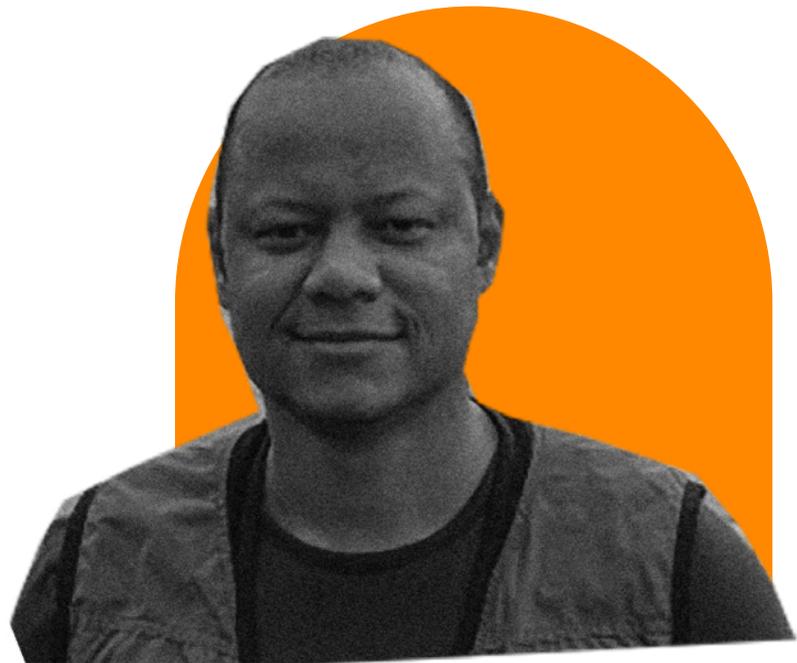
**My name is André Santos de Freitas, I was born in Rio Grande do Sul.** I am an agricultural technician, an agronomist, I have a master's degree in production chains, always believing in a sustainable farming production. My work, since as an undergraduate student, has been with social movements, through extension, in settlements, technical schools, high schools, with a cross-cutting approach. One of them was the rescue of a traditional seed from a Quilombola people in the Rio Grande do Sul state.

One of my first professional jobs was for FASE (acronym for Federation of Organizations for Social and Educational Assistance), which is an institution committed to the work of local organization, community and associative development. I started working in Cáceres on the occasion of a technical assistance and rural extension project, which was a public bidding for ATER, from the Ministry of Agrarian Development (MDA). FASE won the bidding to implement the project, that aimed to provide technical assistance and carry out rural extension in 16 municipalities in the so-called "Baixada Cuiabana" (state of Mato Grosso). I've coordinated this project for almost a year and a half and I've been able to be more close to the practice of fighting for the rights of small farmers, traditional communities and, from that point, to be able

to transmit information to them, about policies and rights, which is a strong characteristic of FASE, and also the technical framework, leading this group.

Afterwards, I had a long experience in the Amazon, with Natura, developing sustainable agro-extractivist chains, in close relationship with communities collecting forest seeds, approaching collection techniques, implementing and following-up agro-industries and a series of issues involving sociobiodiversity.

Although it is a private company, I had the opportunity to do a lot of things that brought citizenship to people, helping them to relate to the market in a transparent way, understanding their rights in the negotiations. I've been at Greenpeace for a year, where I may be in the best place to fight for environmental causes and their impacts on society, with consequences already being felt, such as the climate crisis we are experiencing and its extreme effects. I am currently the forest manager and I am also in charge of the Amazon Campaign, one of Greenpeace's most relevant campaigns.



# How do you assess **the resistance effort and the confrontation of human rights violations** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

## **We've been in a pandemic for almost two years.**

In the beginning, the initiatives of the movements were totally weakened because the degree of importance and the reality we were facing in relation to the harmful and deadly potential of the virus was developing gradually and people were still participating in events, meetings. Then, when the pandemic really took hold, the disarticulation of social movements was very tangible. Virtual articulations leave a lot to be desired in terms of quality and effectiveness compared to the previous way of doing things.

The good thing, now, is that with courage, prudence and with the vaccine, we can start having in-person meetings again. I've done some in-person meetings and the result I had would certainly not be the same if they were virtual meetings.

The pandemic harmed everyone. There is no booklet that teaches people to make a good articulation, to work in a network in a virtual way.

## **The field, the eye contact, and physical touch are part of the Brazilian culture and are missed.**

We cannot have the same extent and quality that we have in face-to-face events.

**Now we are more prepared.** People are using face masks. Social distancing sometimes it is difficult to sustain, but we are more attentive. People who make part of the fight are not denialists, they believe in science and, thus, they care to protect themselves. We had the presence of almost six thousand indigenous individuals in Brasília in September 2021 and we had no problem with Covid. We had a great popular demonstration and we will have an even greater one at the "Abril Indígena" in 2022. From now on, even with this new variant that is coming, the confrontation in relation to the fight for rights will once again gain strength and people already know the mechanisms of how to do it properly, in the environment we are living in today. People are more comfortable and confident that by taking certain precautions and believing in science, it is possible to carry on the fight for the cause.

# How do you assess the struggles **to carry out the promotion and achievement of human rights** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

## **It's time to be even more creative.**

We have to think of new combat methods. One thing that has become quite strong at this time is social media. We have seen young indigenous individuals as social media influencers, being able to make use of many communication tools. This moment demands creativity. Methods we used before, maybe we won't be able to use anymore, because of the crowds.

So we have to think about how to reach the greatest number of people and we need to know where these people are.

The pandemic, at the same time that it stopped a series of in-person actions, also showed another possible tier of relationship, in which people can make contact and relate inside the country or abroad.

In your opinion, **what are the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic** on the work of human rights advocates?

**The work has been impaired.** We would have some face-to-face initiatives, such as a seminar with the Public Prosecution Office, which would be very significant for the so-called “Baixo Tapajós” region, but was made impossible by the pandemic. The only work that Greenpeace managed to do was the one called “Asas da Emergência” (Wings of Emergency”, because there was an airplane, logistics, but we had so many other works to develop and we were unable to do it. **We could not afford for them and it was not safe to expose people to the risk of contamination.** This imminent risk of contamination that all of us were under before vaccination has prevented people from doing their jobs; as well as the public administration and the religious organizations, which play a huge role in bringing citizenship to the countryside of Brazil.

I am completing one year at Greenpeace and a good part of the work I did was through videoconference, but with all the care that the organization devotes to the staff, I was able to have the chance to work in the field, and we managed to do successful work. One of the last was the issue with the ferries on the Madeira River (reporting illegal gold mining in the river); we managed to approach this occurrence based on our field information and our logistics and communication structure.

So, it's good to know that even during the pandemic there are people who count on us, who also see the organization as a reference for human rights, citizenship, advocacy for the environment. Our capacity for resilience will be the flagship of the organizations. The year of 2022 will be full of turmoil, a complicated election year, and all organizations must hold up together, even at a time of instability, because the pandemic is not gone yet, but the organizations have to be together because there is an opportunity now. If we lose this moment, that is an ongoing moment, but if we lose it in October, all the organizations—or a good part of them—will lose together and thus, the entire Brazilian population and the environment will lose as well.

**Would you have suggestions for strategies to strengthen networking** and carry out the popular protection of human rights advocates **from the Covid-19 pandemic?**

In terms of network organization, we participate in several discussion forums. Network articulation is already a challenge when it is face-to-face and, when it is virtual, it becomes a huge challenge. Networking is not just having meetings periodically; it demands commitment, generosity from the partners. And given the agendas and the fact that people are working from home, they participate in several articulations and this ends up to be energy wasting.

We, from Greenpeace, participate in several articulations that we even have to remap, choose the articulations where we can make a difference, contribute, and may this articulation be useful to people. I realized that many articulations emerged in this period and, perhaps, after the pandemic, they will not continue. It has been a good experience, but for us the experience will be to review what we are in and how we can work on them with more quality.

It is important for organizations to adjust in this 2022. Those who are in the third sector usually feature this appeal for the fight for rights. Today we are in articulations that deal with a road highway that will have a strong impact on the Amazon region, named BR 319 Observatory; we participate in the Mining Observatory, which deals with mining, illegal gold market, biological mercury contamination, rivers, people... We have another four or five network articulations. I see that all organizations are fighting for space, for relevance, to keep attracting people and making their cause worthwhile, but this also complicates sometimes the capability to be generous, like circulating materials from other organizations through their channels, for instance. It's something we need to work on.

**All organizations will have to work on some issues:** how to share more information from other organizations in their networks; when a organization can have a leading role, when it can be a coadjutant. These are things that still need to be adjusted so that we can cope with things in a more efficient fashion.

# Ayala Ferreira

## Landless Workers Movement

(Movimento dos/as Trabalhadores/as Rurais Sem Terra-MST)



I'm Ayala Ferreira, I'm a member of the Landless Movement's Human Rights Collective and I live in Marabá, in the south-east of the state of Pará.

I am settler of the agrarian reform and, for about 20 years, I have been with the MST, working more recently in this movement specific collective that brings together our attorneys and activists who take on this specific human rights agenda, associated with the fight for land, and advocacy for workers and agrarian reform.



## How do you assess **the resistance effort and the confrontation of human rights violations** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

The pandemic found a concrete context of a capitalist crisis that directly affected the lives of the popular sectors, the workers, a process of concentration of wealth, deepening of social inequalities and, consequently, violations of basic human rights. Imagine facing the pandemic in a growing context of unemployment, denial of public policies for family farming, increase in famine rates, resurgence of violence caused by police actions in the poor boroughs or in rural spaces, and upturn of actions of repossession and eviction.

The pandemic produced a lot of illness and death due to the difficulty of people to have access to vaccination as a more effective control and combat mechanism against the pandemic. We saw the deaths, the pain and also the neglect of the most vulnerable sectors.

In the countryside, this has been very concrete: **facing the evictions, the threats against the advocacy for the territories, the environmental agenda; the invasions by loggers and prospectors in rural settlements, quilombolas and indigenous people areas came with great force.** And we've been concerned about the movement of the agribusiness sector to resume agendas that would directly affect our perspective of land and territory achievements.

We've acknowledged attacks from many sides during this pandemic period. People who were in the countryside of Brazil, as the people of agrarian reform settlements related to MST, realized that they were not in a position to face this pandemic properly due to the lack of basic resources in hospitals, in addition to enough hospital beds. If I could summarize, I could say that we've had a freezing-like feeling.

## How do you assess the fights **to carry out the promotion and achievement of human rights** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

The traditional practice of rural organizations has this litigating nature, when organizing workers that have always marked our actions as a movement for the struggle for land, as well as other movements that represent the collective interests of the popular sectors of our country. The pandemic put a brake on that. Considering all the opposing agendas, not being able to occupy the streets and mobilization issues were constraints and as a direct consequence we had the feeling that those opposing agendas were coming very fast, with several Bills and government decisions that reinforced the interests that affect our collective rights.

We had to look for other mechanisms, other spaces for the articulation amongst those who share common interests. A concrete example was the articulation around the fight for the vaccine for

all, as well as the articulation to obligate the State to assume the commitment to help, above all, the more vulnerable sectors in our country. This flag brought together popular movements and human rights organizations. **The pandemic has deepened several practices of violence with the abuse of the State through its police force in the communities.**

Our difficulty in occupying the streets made possible this effort to seek to better articulate organizations to face these issues; not to think that the human rights debate is simply abstract, detached from these very concrete issues, because as much as the pandemic exists and still afflicts us on a daily basis, the needs from before the pandemic are still alive.

## In your opinion, **what are the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic** on the work of human rights advocates?

In addition to the pandemic context, it has never been so difficult to advocate for workers, the territory, the environment. The Brazilian space is of profound instability for those who advocate for these flags, and mostly, for the Brazilian rural space. I live in the Brazilian Amazon, a region where violations, criminalization and threats are strong issues.

This offensive environment, this instability added up with one more aspect: there were not and still there aren't spaces in the institutional scenarios in Brazil to address all the reports or the need for protection mechanisms. Since the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT - Comissão Pastoral da Terra) began to systematize conflicts in the countryside, in 1985, this has always been a reality that follows the history of the fight to protect human rights, land, territory and the environment in our country. Until then, these actions generated complaints, litigations and the direct accountability of those who caused them.

Today, there is a behaviour of legitimizing these practices by the government's side. Even with information about homicides, threats, where are we going to report these complaints to hold accountable those directly involved, whether perpetrating or planning these actions?

**We need to look for our care mechanisms because we cannot just wait for the State.**

It's bad when you have a President and many state governments claiming that the ideal model is the one that stands for the private land ownership, deforestation, land squatting, disruption of territories, considers our practices to be outdated and, thus, in need to be overtaken. What we notice is this effort to use the State framework to identify and eliminate the references of many communities spread across our country.

## **Would you have suggestions for strategies to strengthen networking** and carry out the popular protection of human rights advocates from the **Covid-19 pandemic?**

We replaced in-person meetings, which used to be the common practice for everyone, with a virtual mechanism, in a country reality that has inequalities of all kinds: a territorial dimension in which technological conditions are different from one region to another. It was a difficult exercise, but, at the same time, interesting for us to learn how to use these new mechanisms together with the effort to continue discussing and building up.

It was only possible to articulate the flags that emerged in the pandemic and that we collectively embraced because we learned to use this mechanism as a permanent space for meetings, reflections and joint initiatives, as well as to make public what communities were facing, either

from the point of view of violations, either from the side of the autonomous organization in order to cope with the pandemic. A concrete example was how much Brazil learned from the initiatives of indigenous communities to create their self-organized sanitary barriers. **It was a lesson for some of our country's poor boroughs on how to self-organize to identify families that were in need of food and how to mobilize local donation campaigns, to create a common fund and to distribute according to people's needs.** Or community organization initiatives for basic health care, identifying agents, health care practices, in cases of hospital overcrowding and difficulty in serving the new Covid-19 victims.



The catastrophic deaths could have been greater if the local initiatives have not being implemented and if they haven't had been publicized, as well as all the complaints reported.

Our best defence is our ability to organize, to recognize ourselves as subjects part of a collective and always guide our needs as rights that are assured by the Constitution. What sets us in motion is to take what is already provided for and demand the governments to comply with, no matter what. To hold the State accountable for implement public policies is also a mechanism that legitimises our political practice, and a legitimate political practice is also a mechanism of self-defence in front of a context of violence.

Another interesting aspect is: **how to convince society to understand that family farmers agenda for implementing agrarian reform is a way of overcoming inequalities?**

The power of persuasion is also a way of creating this so-called self-protection because our country is driven by public opinion; State behaviour is driven by public opinion. So, this effort to associate our political practice to the society's imagination, hoping it will advocate for us, is an important aspect when it comes to creating this

kind of protection. A concrete example of this relationship with society in the context of the pandemic were the solidarity relationships: donations of staple food, food parcels, packed meals, and the implementation of popular community health programs.

In our political practice, we rely just a little or almost nothing on the State protection mechanisms, but, at the same time, we cannot deconstruct what has been learned in 38 years of organizational political practice. We have seen a lot of pain and suffering in these last two years, but we also see the effort to keep in mind the mystique, the resistance and the effort from the popular sectors to overcome these constraints imposed on us. Despite our critical—and often discouraging—view, we also see the desire to be powered by great feelings of love, overcoming, cooperation, and solidarity.

**What drives us** is, fundamentally, this desire to overcome inequalities, violence, the leverage of rights for a new moment in which we can have full and dignified conditions of life and happiness.

# **Benedito Roberto Barbosa, a.k.a. “Dito”**

União dos Movimentos  
de Moradia de São Paulo  
(Association of pro-Housing  
Movements of São Paulo)



My name is **Benedito Roberto Barbosa**, popularly known as “Dito” or “Dito da moradia”, for many years acting in the movements’ fight for housing with the Association of pro-Housing Movements of São Paulo, together with the “Central de Movimentos Populares” (Popular Movements Hub) and as a communitarian attorney, also for the Association, at the “Centro Gaspar Garcia de Direitos Humanos” (Gaspar Garcia Human Rights Center), and as well supporting some movements in São Paulo and Brazil.

Currently, I am also collaborating in the articulation of the “Campanha Nacional Despejo Zero” (Zero Eviction National Campaign) and the “Comitê Brasileiro de Defensoras e Defensores de Direitos Humanos” (Brazilian Committee of Advocates for Human Rights), this network that is very important for the advocates support, especially in this serious moment of the pandemic we are facing.



# How do you assess **the resistance effort and the confrontation of human rights violations** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

I have been participating in the Brazilian Committee of Advocates for Human Rights and I've been following this articulation since 2014, **when I suffered a very violent aggression here in São Paulo, at the time of the Soccer World Cup. An unlawful arrest by the military police during a repossession action** and, because of this, at the request of the Committee, I was included in the Brazilian National Program for the Protection of Advocates for Human Rights.

This Program has always worked in a precarious way and since the so-called 2016 coup d'état, it's been suffering from a process of deconstruction that worsened under President Bolsonaro's term and got even more worse during the pandemic, leaving all advocates lacking of assistance and at risk. Data from the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR/UN) for the protection of human rights advocates, published in early 2021, are alarming: a human rights advocate dies from murder in Brazil every eight days.

This data raising shows that, in Latin America, Brazil is the second (Colombia is the first) in terms of lack of protection for advocates, even taking into account the paramilitaries and the drug trafficking situation in Colombia.

In global terms, Brazil is where advocates are in the most fragile situation, which has only increased during the pandemic. Surveys by the Brazilian Committee of Advocates, taken in a recent complaint report to the High Commissioner and the UN Human Rights Rapporteurs, showed that the situation of fragility and lack of protection for advocates has become extremely serious in Brazil, due to the processes of violence, threats, criminalization and murder, but also the loss of many defenders due to assistance's neglect, support for work and psychological issues, in addition to unemployment constraints.

The whole world acknowledges the case of Mrs. Marielle Franco, who was murdered in 2018, an emblematic case that is just the tip of the iceberg of problems related to advocates situation.

But the concrete fact is that, on the frontier of the fight in rural areas, advocating for the protection of indigenous and quilombola populations, in the slums (so-called "favelas"), advocates are extremely fragile and constantly threatened. We have data on human rights advocates' deaths in both urban and rural areas that have been taken to the **Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR/OAS)**, the National Human Rights Council and the United Nations. This is very difficult time for protection and also for advocacy in Brazil.

## How do you assess the fights **to carry out the promotion and achievement of human rights** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

**In pandemic process, we've followed-up the Zero Eviction Campaign** and witnessed the arrests of many leaders across the country during the moments of repossession/eviction and also threats to attorneys in several states. In the field of housing, I followed-up and acted in reporting complaints, mapping of eviction and violence processes against our people who have been suffering from constant eviction situations, but also violations against advocates, also with criminalization and disqualification of the fights.

I'm talking about housing and the Campaign, but we know that in the labour union field, in rural areas (especially in the North and Northeast regions and the state of Mato Grosso) there have been cases of extreme violence against advocates working with indigenous and quilombola populations. Physical and psychological violences against African-based religions, against LGBTIQ+ populations, threats, situations involving prejudice, also associated with religious fundamentalism. There are several layers of the processes of violence against advocates, on several fronts and we have difficulty giving visibility to these processes limiting their performances.

## In your opinion, **what are the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic** on the work of human rights advocates?

We act on several fronts and, in these days, we've had a huge dismantling of public policies. **In the housing policy, the cuts were brutal: more than 90% cut in housing programs**, in the so-called program "Minha Casa Minha Vida", which is suitable to those earning up to three minimum wages. This impacted directly on low-income families: **unemployment, impoverishment, lack of support**. There has been a very large increase in real estate speculation and in the actions of militias and police in the occupation situations. A resurgence of violence, poverty and lack of public policies.

It is as extremely difficult moment for the fight of human rights advocates, but even so, we have managed to articulate trying to resist. One of the examples is the Zero Eviction Campaign, which has received important support from the "Coordenadoria Ecumênica de Serviço" (Ecumenical Service Coordination - CESE),

"Habitat para a Humanidade" (Habitat for Humanity), "Fórum Nacional de Reforma Urbana" (National Forum for Urban Reform), and it has been very important in strengthening the fight of our communities. But, in addition to the Campaign, in Brazil we had hundreds of actions of solidarity, resistance, popular mobilization - either local, municipal, national and also international - to strengthen the advocates fight processes and our agenda during the pandemic.

Now we deal with the attempt to approve an anti-terrorism Bill to increase the process of persecution and criminalization of social movements, but even so, they played a very important role in the fight and popular resistance in the occupations, in the confrontations, in the mobilizations, in the so-called "Fora Bolsonaro" (Out Bolsonaro) agendas and all the other actions carried out in the popular field to face this moment.

## **Would you have suggestions for strategies to strengthen networking** and carry out the popular protection of human rights advocates from the **Covid-19 pandemic?**

**Keep strengthening our network performance is very important.** Focus on the process of mobilization and articulation because it is also not worth it for us to associate ourselves with generic agenda. Working on very concrete and articulated agenda has been helping us. People who are focused in the health sector have to strengthen these agendas. For those who are working more strongly in the networks and strengthening of complaints associated with the human rights advocates, it is important to focus and strengthen these articulations that help in the support process. Whoever is in the housing field, strengthen the Zero Eviction Campaign.

And these articulations, at some point, will meet to reflect and strengthen our mobilization agendas.

Strengthen our influence over the National Congress and have an impact on the electoral process in 2022. We'll need to have this debate. It is not a political party matter, but our organizations as a group can act through letters of commitment to candidates, so that we can propose our current agendas for this year, when we will have a presidential contest and elections in the states.



Obviously, we cannot base our agenda only over this, but this matter will have an important weight, especially in the second half of the year.

**We, from the urban field**, are articulating with the BrCidades network and other organizations a great meeting for the right to the city in the first half of 2022 to organize an agenda in the urban field and continue strengthening the Zero Eviction Campaign. The Supreme Court Justice's decision Supreme Court Justice Mr. Barroso's suspension of evictions runs until March 2022 and we don't know what will happen afterwards. So, our process of mobilization, organization and pressure on the Judiciary, the Executive and the Legislative will have to be even more intense and we will need to be very focused and there will certainly be many fights, many occupations, to ensure the agenda against evictions and for the guarantee of the right to housing can continue in 2022.

### **We need to involve the youth.**

The Zero Eviction Campaign did a very intense job of articulating the youth and we learned a lot: letting go of personal issues, local political issues or other political issues to strengthen concrete agendas that will somehow guarantee the improvement of our people's life. Unity in the popular tier to strengthen the resistance and defence of human rights agenda must continue in the year 2022. In Bahia, there is a movement that is a reference for me that is named "Reaja ou Será Morto" (Fight back or you'll be dead). So, these words are left for us. We have to keep fighting back, struggling, and it will be fundamental for us to be able to do this together, to advance in our process of resistance and combat in 2022.

# Cacique Babau

## Chief of Tupinambá People from Serra do Padeiro (BA)



**I am Chief (Cacique) Babau, from the Tupinambá people of Serra do Padeiro (Bahia). I was born, grew up and since my great-grandparents we have been in this same place. Our role has always been played in the fight for well-being.**

We worked, from my old relatives, to never let violence succeed around us. And we serve all the people who approach us for something, regardless of who they are or how they are. This bothered many people. We fought for our

territory, in defence of nature and our well-being, which led to a very strong criminalization that continues until today.

But this also had a positive side: the national and international recognition of the “Aldeia Serra do Padeiro” (Serra do Padeiro Tribe) and, therefore, today I work all over the country. All the time I’m talking to leaders seeking for advice, and sometimes we really have to send help. This is my job. And to always ask indigenous peoples to be independent, not to depend on third parties, to work and create spaces for life in their territories.



# How do you assess **the resistance effort and the confrontation of human rights violations** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

**This is a constant fight that has intensified these days. Brazil features a peculiar thing: the worse the scenario is, they realize that it is more difficult for those at the base to ask for help, so they intensify the violence.** In calm times, it is easier to file a complaint. But in a time of several restrictions to preserve life, these bad people seize the moment and attack with full force.

I'm talking to indigenous people all over the country, especially in the states part of the Amazon region. It seems that the situation there in these days exceeded all reasonable limits. I had to have meetings with Guajajara, Kaiapó, and Canoé peoples. In the state of Rondônia, the Karipuna people are being one of the most attacked in their reserves for logging, other peoples are being attacked for mining. But the worst attack is allowing the indigenous individuals in the city to die of Covid-19 because they have not been accepted by the Brazilian government, who wanted them to be 200, 300 km far away, inside their villages, while they were sick. In the last days, from my village, I had to send support for the Canoé, a people that has been almost extinct with the invasion of migrants to Rondônia in the 1970s. Mrs. Eva Canoé lost her 18-year-old son; her husband, who is the chief ("cacique"), was infected by Covid-19 and is suffering from acute consequences (sequelae) and the State did not give even the minimum support to buy the necessary medicines.

It was very important. I congratulate the "Articulação dos Povos Indígenas do Brasil" (Articulation of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil - APIB) that appealed to the Supreme Court, sought for allies. They didn't stop. They focused so much on it that they didn't have the proper time and staff to take care of the grassroots leaders, because it's a lot to look after and the government dropped their artillery on us.

This is the serious thing: in a period of pandemic, the State power is all set to violate indigenous people's rights. That's why APIB's accusation of genocide is valid. But the co-authors of this crime have to be named because, while APIB was fighting for the right to drink potable water in the villages, to have medicines, to have assistance, through these claims with the Supreme Court, the government was fostering loggers, promoting illegal mining in the villages, offering transportation to miners to go to Brasília (Brazil's

State Capital) on a FAB (Brazilian Air Force) plane, funding the urban indigenous individuals to offer opposition to their own people who live in the villages to allow those violations to happen. In the midst of the pandemic, there has been a massive attack by the Brazilian State on these traditional peoples. The government financed and transported the miners and loggers into the indigenous villages. **The Munduruku people suffered a lot.**

Many warrior-women have been attacked for being against mining and several leaders are afraid. There has always been invasions, but this time the government has set up a kind of militia. Even when there was rumour about the murder of Cacique Babau, they said "Brasilia" (the Central Government) ordered it. On the Yanomami issue, since Bolsonaro's campaign for president, he stated what he was going to do, and he did it in the middle of the pandemic, even with the Supreme Court's decision to remove the miners. Vice-president Mourão, with all the law enforcement under his power, spent R\$ 500 million and did not protect any territory. On the contrary, covered up for the invasions to happen in a way the indigenous could not act or report; a plot against the NGOs has been set up, creating a discourse that these entities are not legitimate. At the same time, we had to face the Time Frame Milestone trial, with the government acting against it, and the Supreme Court has not given a sentence until this very day.

## How do you assess the fights **to carry out the promotion and achievement of human rights** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

I see them as positive and necessary. Society, in general, was mobilized, the "Central Única das Favelas" (Unified Slums Hub - CUFA) provided support throughout the whole country. Even in small towns, the support of these organizations managed to reach. International organizations also did not take their eyes off Brazil.

I didn't see effective performance of some evangelical churches and it surprises me a lot to know that they sided with this genocidal President Bolsonaro. Not only sided, but they spread lies



about the vaccine and other things that could preserve life. They used the influence they have over human beings to send them to certain death, to support the president and to bargain some domains within the Brazilian state to annihilate people in the future. They need to rethink their faith, reflect on what their leaders are conveying.

## In your opinion, **what are the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the work of human rights advocates?**

Here in our village, we chose to maintain the ancient tradition of our people, of doing everything based on what our spirits command for us. A little before the pandemic, the so-called “Encantados” (note: enchanted entities, allegedly spiritual) said that we couldn’t go out anymore, that we should stay in seclusion because a very serious illness was about to arrive. The disease breaks out, but the “Encantados” had already ordered that we had to cultivate some specific crops, raise some specific animals, for us to spend some time in seclusion. We strictly followed what has been instructed.

When the disease really arrives in Brazil, when the government imposes sanitary restrictions, we receive guidance from our “Encantados” to close the access roads to the village. We made the barriers in state highways BA 668 and BA 669, with the help of neighbour small producers. About the barrier in BA 669, the mayors of the municipalities of São José da Vitória and Una agreed, but the municipality of Buerarema created a big problem, and filed a complaint within the state government and this caused a very serious litigation, but we managed to keep the barrier.

**We created an internal protocol in the village:** to buy some essential goods, we made an agreement with some local markets, in order for them to bring the goods to the barrier and we would pay and take them to the village. We raise some cattle, then we would slaughter them and distribute the parts. We established a chicken farm with 5,000 animals and during this period we produced more than 20 crates of eggs per day, which have been distributed to the village and also to non-Indian neighbours. For approximately 6 months, the “Aldeia Serra do Padeiro” supplied the neighbourhood with goods produced locally. Guided by the “Encantados”, we made a plant-based medicine obtained from the forest that would help to protect while the vaccine did not arrive. With that, no one has been contaminated; neither we nor the non-indigenous neighbours

who used the same medicine. We did not lose none of the villagers. When the vaccination came, we ordered everyone to take it and the “Encantados” guided us to continue taking the medicines because of the virus variants. I’m the only one who’s been inside the village since the beginning of the pandemic.

The pandemic did not impact the “Aldeia Serra do Padeiro” because we had prepared ourselves for this reality. But what we have seen outside the village was devastating. The indigenous peoples were expecting support from the “Fundação Nacional do Índio” (National Indian Foundation - FUNAI), from the “Secretaria Especial de Saúde Indígena” (Special Secretariat for Indigenous Health - SESAI), and this did not happen, and the suffering and loss of indigenous individuals lives were severe. That’s why I keep saying that we have to work for the indigenous peoples to become more restricted to their own culture and self-sustainability, without massive government intervention because the government failed badly and these people suffered not only from the pandemic, but from lack of basic food, depending on what could arrive from the urban areas, even those peoples who are settled in extensive territories. It is a very serious question for us to think about.

The Maxacali situation has been also very serious, with many people moving around having no place to settle down. In the place they used to live, a dam collapsed and damaged everything around. Today, they are occupying an area of the federal government in the state of Minas Gerais. They are fine, but it’s been difficult.

## **Would you have suggestions for strategies to strengthen networking and carry out the popular protection of human rights advocates from the Covid-19 pandemic?**

**I am an outside observer. Our enemies study us all the time and they hate human rights** because they say they serve to protect the bad guys. What I noticed is that they are infiltrating several of their people inside these government bodies, putting a lot of wolves in sheep’s clothing inside these sectors. My suggestion is that human rights could pass through a screening. The problem is that the government is creating mechanisms to always have more representatives by their side in these sectors. I realize that human rights organizations are really under attack, not only in Brazil, but around the world. **There is a trend pattern for them to occupy these posts to suppress rights, using human rights itself.**



# Carlos Nicodemos

## Organização de Direitos Humanos Projeto Legal



**I am Carlos Nicodemos, attorney-at-law, advocating in the field of human rights since 1990 and, since 1996, I have been a member of the “Movimento Nacional de Direitos Humanos” (National Human Rights Movement - MNDH). I am founder and member of Projeto Legal, a non-profit organization that works in the promotion, protection and advocacy for children and adolescents in situations of social vulnerability, located in Rio de Janeiro.**

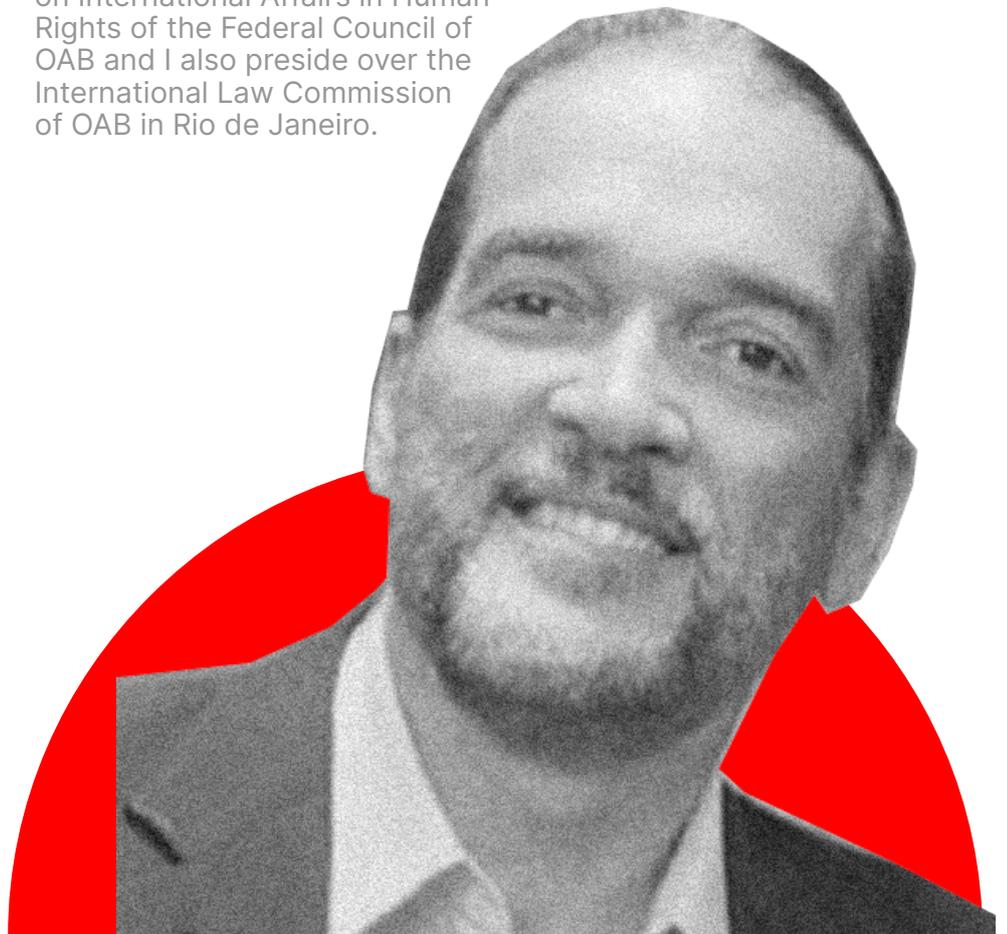
In addition to participating in these two organizations, I also coordinate the legal work of other entities in the field of human rights, such as the “Movimento de Reintegração das Pessoas Atingidas pela Hanseníase” (Morhan); “Associação Brasileira de Imprensa” (ABI); “Comissão de Combate à Intolerância

Religiosa” (CCIR); “Centro de Articulação de Populações Marginalizadas” (CEAP), in addition to the “Organização de Direitos Humanos – Projeto Legal”, which is a member of MNDH, among others.

As I have an attorney practice focused on the human rights field, I am also a member of some committees of the “Ordem dos Advogados do Brasil” (Brazilian Bar Association - OAB) system. Among them, I am a member of the Human Rights Commission of the Federal Council of OAB, president of the Subcommittee on International Affairs in Human Rights of the Federal Council of OAB and I also preside over the International Law Commission of OAB in Rio de Janeiro.

These are some representative posts that I occupy and through them I develop some human rights initiatives.

To make part of the MNDH history was and is an opportunity to make the Law science a means to transform lives, together with the utopian search for a more fair and fraternal society. Each victory we achieve within the legal system is a step forward, it means the renewal of our hopes.



## How do you assess **the resistance effort and the confrontation of human rights violations** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

We are experiencing a unique moment in Brazil because we are, historically, in a process of redemocratization of the Brazilian State that began in the 1980s and had its main milestone in the 1988's Constitution. This had been developing in the capacity building, fundamental rights, and public policies fields, but since 2016, we have had an interruption in this redemocratization process. We had an interference process because of the unlawful impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff from the Presidency of the Republic, which created an environment of setbacks regarding human rights in general.

This is an element that has worsened the scenario of the health pandemic that we are experiencing now, because in 2018, in the face of an electoral process, a far-right government that does not have the slightest empathy with the field of human rights policies was established, and also

no empathy with the field of democracy, especially participatory democracy, through the rights councils. So, there is a sum of pandemics: a political pandemic that we have been experiencing since 2016, worsening in 2018, with this far-right government ruling now and that will lead to a deepening of human rights violations with the health pandemic.

**The health pandemic has exposed numerous violations of the Brazilian State that, added to the "political pandemic", will present scenarios such as:** institutional racism, hunger/food insecurity, violence against groups in vulnerable situations (children, women, among others) that were not covered by a welfare State, a democratic State that could give a minimum assurance to the dignity of these people.

## How do you assess the fights **to carry out the promotion and achievement of human rights** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

It is impossible to dissociate the health pandemic from the political context we are experiencing. I have no doubts in saying that, with any government – except this one – endowed with a minimum of reasonableness, civility and understanding of the Rule of Law logic, we would have a different environment from what we are experiencing now. The fact is that the pandemic deepened, with the exposure, numerous human rights violations. We cannot say that there has been an increase in domestic violence because the pandemic may have revealed more clearly and objectively the domestic violence in the face of the imposed social dynamics. We are dealing with very high numbers of violence against women, children, people with disabilities and elderly in domestic and intra-family environments, which

reveal deep socioeconomic inequalities and the groups in greater vulnerability, resulting from the superstructures of exclusion, as is with the ethnic-racial issue, end up suffering a greater process of segregation and greater violation of human rights.

We are living a very difficult time, in which a highly violating State is presented and this very State plays the role of being the main actor in this process of violation of rights. We have domestic violence with several actors involved. When assessing children, for instance, we take a look at parents and guardians. But we have to understand that today the State, for what it manages and maintains, due to the absence of a public policy on human rights and a pandemic condition placed, we have a State that manages institutional violence that needs to be reversed with objective public policies that can, at least, protect these groups, especially those more vulnerable.

## In your opinion, **what are the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic** on the work of human rights advocates?

In this chapter of the human rights agenda, we have been looking for a concept or format for a program for the protection of human rights advocates that could guarantee independence and autonomy to operate, with the active participation of society, which happened through the deliberative councils. We are talking about the official program. But we see that, with the aggravation of human rights policy problems since 2016, and with the pandemic itself, there is a state of greater vulnerability of advocates, because **there is a loss of institutional reference, role played by the councils of rights**, where many human rights violations have been reported, letting very clear an open situation for the insertion of what we call the criminalization of social movements, which gains space each day more and points out to the advocates, and as they do not have a reference space (the rights councils) anymore, that are boosters of public policies, then leading to the deepening of the vulnerability of these agents, men and women who are on the front of the advocacy for human rights in Brazil.

## **Would you have suggestions for strategies to strengthen networking** and carry out the popular protection of human rights advocates from the **Covid-19 pandemic?**

We have to revisit the understanding of the idea that democracy and human rights go hand in hand. There is no way to make a claim for human rights policies without a debate on democracy in Brazil. And I feel that civil society doesn't have that debate; it seems that it is a separate debate or it has contours and conditions linked to the electoral process, when, as a matter of fact, there is no link. Claiming for human rights policies is claiming for democracy in Brazil, which is still very incipient, with its way through a process of redemocratization and in need of more discussion about it, especially by the side of the third sector.

The associations have and must take ownership of this discussion about democracy, participate in the national agenda, hold the debate in the search for a democratic alternative to manage the country; otherwise we will work on a functionalist idea about human rights policies, without having them effectively attached to an alteration or change of framework.

I would propose three major questions in relation to this understanding that democracy and human rights go hand in hand and how we can reverse this situation. The first: to insist on the so-called system of checks and balances, not only considering the legal system, but also other systems of control; to demand the re-activation of the rights councils as spaces for debate on democracy and human rights. The second question is about the internationalization of our human rights agenda; we need to work, more and more, on regional guidelines in Latin America that can translate demands of a common scenario and that can be articulated in a transforming perspective. Finally, the third question is about a systemic networking action, bringing together not only organizations from the same field, but also cross-cutting segments of society, such as the labour union movement, organizations linked to the environment, to the indigenous cause, that can build a networked democracy and human rights agenda leading to more significant protection and advancement.

It is given that debating a program of human rights advocates from a popular perspective or from a State perspective imposes establishing the human rights agenda in the country and that also means opening a debate regarding our democratic rule of law. If we don't have this discussion, we will be stuck, discussing individual, institutional agendas and outside a larger and broader context that can really lead to a transformation of Brazilian society. **The moment is very difficult. It is a moment of aggravation of human rights policy problems and, from my point of view, a tip for us not to miss the pathway is to have a compartmentalized debate on stagnant policies**, without understanding this larger structure that is given in our State, which is a process of redemocratization in which we need to understand our role as third sector.

# Carmen Silva

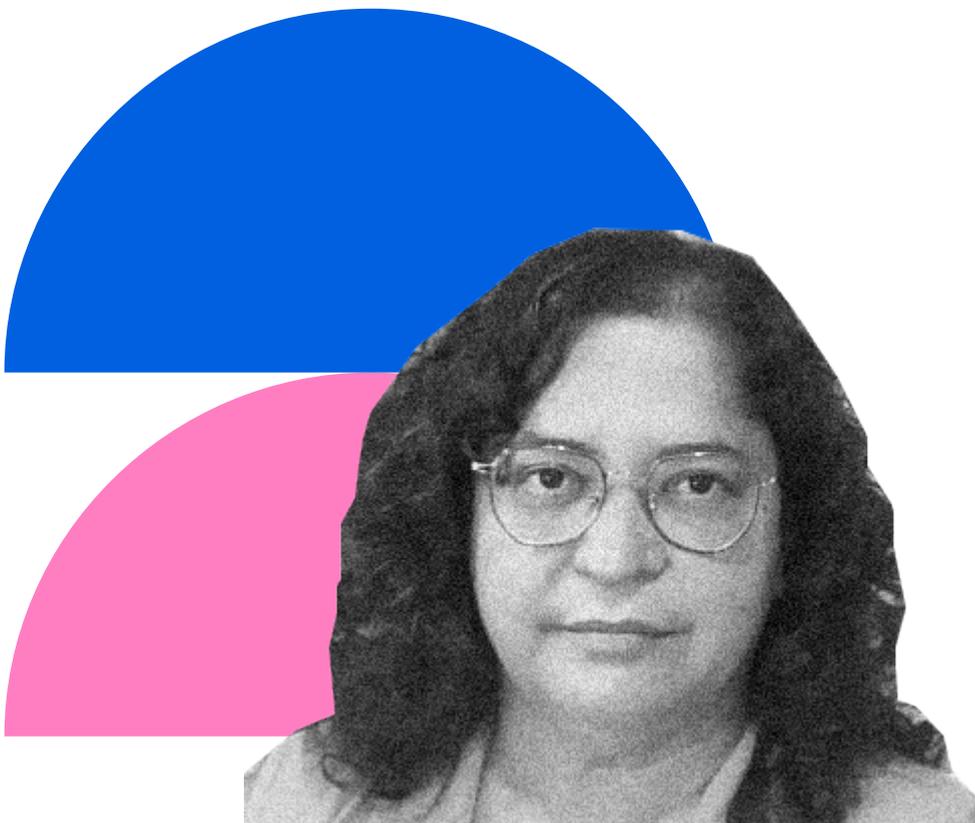
## SOS Corpo



**I'm Carmen Sílvia Maria da Silva, I'm 57 years old, I'm from São Luís do Maranhão and I've been living in Recife for almost 20 years.**

My current affiliation is with SOS Corpo Instituto Feminista para a Democracia (SOS Body Feminist Institute for Democracy), which is a feminist organization from Recife that is turning 40 in 2021 and works with education, communication, research, advice to popular movements, with several political articulations in the midst of the feminist movement.

I started advocating at age 14, so I went through many places: I worked in the popular movement in São Luís, also in the journalists' union movement, which is my original profession; in the "Partido dos Trabalhadores" (Workers' Party - PT), in its foundation and until a few years ago; I worked at the Instituto Cajamar, which was linked to the training work of the "Central Única dos Trabalhadores" (Workers Unified Hub - CUT), the popular movements and also the Workers' Party. I have a background career in this field of human rights in the comprehensive sense: social, political, working class, black people, peripheral populations and, fundamentally, women's fights.



## How do you assess **the resistance effort and the confrontation of human rights violations** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

The context of the pandemic has greatly exacerbated social inequalities and, in addition, emotionally destabilized a large number of advocates because we are facing a pandemic, under the rule of a federal government that is denialist, authoritarian, has fascist tendencies and has worked to the pandemic to succeed, it has promoted a genocide. So, the fact the popular movements and people who advocate for human rights have kept on fighting, this fact itself, is per se very relevant.

This struggle had several characteristics: from the need for survival - and then we saw many solidarity actions aimed at this - to the growth of the ability to articulate between several movements, NGOs, parties, and unions, to pressure public authorities, either it in the sense of retaking rights that were being violated or removed, either in the sense of overthrowing the government.

## How do you assess the fights **to carry out the promotion and achievement of human rights** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

**These fights were of several kinds.** In the fight against the limit for government expenditures, imposed by the National Congress and which reduced the possibility of social policies to reach the population in need, the National organization called "Frente Nacional Direitos Valem Mais" has been strengthened, and it has been very important. Another very important front is the "Coalizão Negra por Direitos" (Black Coalition for Rights), which carried out national mobilizations against the police attacks in poor communities, despite the measures of the Federal Supreme Court (STF).

In the field of housing, there is the Zero Eviction Campaign so that people are not evicted when they are oriented by the public health sector to stay at home. The evictions carried out by the State itself during this period constitute a big violation of rights. We women took up a national fight in order to the reports of violence against

women could be made virtually and this was very important because violence against women in a situation of social distancing has increased a lot.

But the greatest example of all this is that we managed, in the years 2020 and 2021, to carry out, between the fronts "Brasil Popular", "Povo Sem Medo", national social movements and left-wing parties, numerous acts against the president Bolsonaro government because he is today the main human rights violator. He is not only violating the rights that we claim as a popular movement, but he is also disregarding the Federal Constitution and the laws that protected rights in the country. In addition to the limiting of the government expenditures, it is still in place a parallel budget to make rights unfeasible and resume the very typical physiologism of Brazilian politics. Fighting this fascist-like government is the main way to defend human rights in the country.

# In your opinion, **what are the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic** on the work of human rights advocates?

I would like to mention three types of impacts on the work of human rights advocates. The three are equally severe, with no weighting among them. **The first is that the majority of human rights advocates are people from working classes** and this moment of the pandemic and also of the economic policy of the federal government, which happened together, means that they need to dedicate less time to advocacy and more time to make a living. On the other hand, if you are a community leader, part of a women's group, a black movement, youngsters, who are working with culture in the poor boroughs and, around your house, everyone is starving, you dedicate yourself much more to the local plan to be able to assure the minimum conditions. And this also has an impact on the difficulty of making larger joint articulations that may have power of pressure on the government.

The second is that some people had the right to be in social distancing because their work could be performed from home, **but many people couldn't because, due to their work nature, they had to figure it out on how to make a living again.** They had to leave their neighbourhood, take transportation, struggle to get.

We had to advocate for human rights in the virtual environment, through the Internet, when we know that access to the internet is not equal in Brazil. Most people, even those who are advocates, do not deal with the Internet as a powerful tool for the circulation of information; they just know basic operational features and due to this we've had a lot of confusion in the beginning, because everything that was done in-person had to be changed to virtual, without having the skills yet and without having the financial resources to assure an efficient broadband (even if the organizations or movements could afford for a good Internet connection, in their houses they could not always afford for it or even because the neighbourhood is not served by a good ISP).

The third element is that the fact we are experiencing a pandemic in parallel with a fascist-like government rule that unleashed very retrograde and violent forces in Brazilian society: not only militias and armed people have been stepped-up to a greater degree of violence, but also that diffuse violence affecting, especially, human rights advocates. Many people has

suffered from mental illness due to the fear of the pandemic, fear of a fascist-like government and even the fear of people on the streets buying the Bolsonaro discourse and attacking dissidents, who try to resist the patriarchal standard or this racist and capitalist system. And the "Sistema Único de Saúde" (Unified Health System - SUS), that has been weakened in recent periods, had to throw all the strengths left into the fight against the pandemic, and primary local care services for the population became very precarious.

## **Would you have suggestions for strategies to strengthen networking** and carry out the popular protection of human rights advocates from the **Covid-19 pandemic?**

**Strengthening networking** and making it broader depends on a political conception stating that several **movements acting on various causes are legitimate political subjects, as long as they are geared towards confronting inequalities and building transformation processes.** If we start from an opposite assumption, that my movement or yours, which have X or Y characteristics, is the most subject or the most radical or the one that will lead the others, so the articulation cannot be built. It is needed a political conception stating that the various movements, parties and organizations in the left-wing and all their causes are relevant and they can build an articulation capable of transforming our country. Building up this conception implies in a lot of debate, a lot of political training.

This conception is not just mine, but is shared with the feminist movement in which I participate, the "Articulação de Mulheres Brasileiras" (Articulation of Brazilian Women - AMB), and the "Fórum de Mulheres de Pernambuco" (Pernambuco Women's Forum). That's the concept we are building at SOS Corpo and that has to do with a worldview that seeks to articulate social, political and cultural dimensions. We need to have



this in an overlapped way, which implies seeing the social relations that shape this system in a substantial form, articulating the dimensions of class, gender, sex, race, and ethnicity in a single process, because we are integral human beings.

It is very important to fight for human rights based on this vision of integrity and indivisibility, which has already guided human rights formulations since the Vienna Conference.

Another element is the issue on resources, in order to the movements to be allowed to have a continuous and systematic performance in the decision-making processes beyond local plans. The vast majority of movements do not have the resources to afford for good broadband Internet, to travel across the country, and things are decided in these spaces. **In order to have strong articulations, it is necessary to have a distribution of resources that includes the various causes, the various movements.**

We also need to be able to communicate our causes and empower the subjects spread the voice about them beyond our restricted field of networks, of articulations, but **we need to assure digital care because we need to extrapolate our own field, attracting more hearts and minds to the political fight of the social movements as a comprehensive fight for transformation.** But we need to do this with safety, in a way we do not jeopardize the integrity and lives of human rights advocates.

# Catarina de Almeida Santos

## Campanha Nacional pelo Direito à Educação



**My name is Catarina de Almeida Santos, I am from Bahia, but I currently live in Brasília, and I work at the Education Department of the University of Brasília.**

I am a member of “Comitê Diretivo da Campanha Nacional pelo Direito à Educação” (Steering Committee of the National Campaign for the Right to Education) and also coordinate the “Comitê Distrito Federal” (Federal District Committee) for the Campaign. We act, mostly, on the right to education, but we are in a country that has been denying human rights to most of its population and the achievement

of the right to education requires us to act on a set of other coadjuvant rights that are fundamental for education to be effective. During the pandemic, the denial of these rights has been intensified. So, we developed a set of actions looking at all these rights that were being neglected before and during the pandemic, and that we are fighting to reverse.



## How do you assess **the resistance effort and the confrontation of human rights violations** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

The pandemic brings a set of difficulties to the right-holders and to the people who are fighting for their rights. It becomes a much more serious issue when we have a Constitutional Amendment no. 95/2016 that essentially limits primary government expenditures that are bonded to article 6 of the Constitution, the social rights and, because of this we will have consequences regarding article 5: the right to life. **The country was already following a logic of austerity policies with that Constitutional Amendment and, when the pandemic arrived, problems got worse.**

It means, for activists and human rights advocates, to be overburdened in very adverse conditions. The initiatives of denying rights have intensified during the pandemic, including with threats to advocates, coming from all sides; deprivation of several benefits, including health care, lack of vaccines, food; attacks on Science. When attacks that huge happens, the population, historically having denied their rights, is the most affected—the poor, black, poor boroughs inhabitants, indigenous, children (suffering from child labour).

This means that human rights activists have to intensify their activities and to become important figures to assure the minimum set of rights for this population.

This ranges from content production; offer opposition to public administration wanting to stop lockdowns in commerce and schools, putting at risk the lives of these populations that, as a rule, are made invisible; protection of women and children who have to stay at home due to social distancing, closed together with their aggressors.

If the activists already were important, they become even more, not only for first-hand confrontation, but for the production of content, dissemination of data to show the need for the Brazilian State to intervene in the various entities along the federation and also in the legal system. **Activists are those subjects who expose violations to the general public and articulate with a wide range of actors, from international organizations to legal system executives and policy makers (congresspeople), various networks and local communities.** When working with the concept of advocating for the rights of the poorest, activists and advocates will be much more attacked by those who want inequalities and violations to persist.

And we, working in the field of education, had to think about acting in networks, acting with a cross-cutting approach. Labour activists are overburdened, the number of threatens increased, however, the importance of these activists has been highlighted, including educators that engaged with this fight.

## How do you assess the fights **to carry out the promotion and achievement of human rights** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

With great difficulty, but it is also a time when we acknowledge each day more the need for network articulations, that is paramount proceeding hand in hand. The exposure of the violations, the greater contact with people, the livestreams, allowed us to talk to many more people, to see the importance of intersectionality in the field of public policies and the more collective intersectional action of activists. That's the

paradox. It is not possible to think of acting alone in the field of education. It won't happen without protection, if people do not have a place to live, what to eat, no access to technology, if they are suffering from violence. **It is only possible to defend human rights if we perform collectively and intersectionality.**

The 'Campanha Nacional pelo Direito à Educação' (National Campaign for the Right to Education) joined forces with groups that we had not yet worked with and deepened the relationship with others. The pandemic showed how it is possible for us to work in articulation. This is not about everybody doing the same thing, but it is about how the different areas cross-cut each other and about how this articulated action is important, so that human rights can be fulfilled. Not to mention that we cannot cover – in the sense of performance capacity, but also of knowledge – all these violations.

**So, when you articulate with other groups, you have more data and much more possibility to make more assertive decisions, agreed and consensual, so that the action will be effective.**

Brazil is too big as a country: territorially– which impedes us from understanding the different realities–, culturally, but, above all, taking inequality into account. Economic inequality, which is originated on racial and gender issues, disarticulated us and we will only have more assertive actions if the group is diverse in its dimensions of gender, race, and geographic space. This is what we built to articulate political agents in favour of advocating for causes, not only within the municipal and state legislative houses, but also within the National Congress, with the different states representatives, about the decisions they will take in the National Congress; as well as the Prosecutor's Office and other necessary actors to assure these rights.

## In your opinion, **what are the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic** on the work of human rights advocates?

**The impact on the lives of activists has to do with how much the right-holders have their rights violated or not.** The intensification rights violations has a great impact on the lives of activists: getting sick due to the excess of work, physical and psychological exhaustion in coping with even more violations; attacks; restriction of political rights and ways of approaching the subjects who are suffering from violations; threats to their lives.

The less democratic the State, the more impact on the lives of those who defend democracy.

Defending democracy is defending the rights of all the right-holders. And the human rights advocates, from the point of view of those who defend the contrary, are seen as advocates of those who threaten life and not advocates for life itself and the rights of every individual. The consequences for the subjects who are not having their rights granted will always be much greater than for us who are on the defence zone, with some basic rights secured. But the more intense the denial of rights, the more consequences for those who advocate for rights, some even having their lives threatened or taken.

## **Would you have suggestions for strategies to strengthen networking** and carry out the popular protection of human rights advocates from the **Covid-19 pandemic?**

This articulated action is essential for us to have protection for the groups in their localities. It starts not only from building a protection agenda within the whole network, but also from being able to articulate different agents in the localities and support these advocates, for example, in debates,

hearings, in articulation with councilmen and councilwomen, Prosecutor's Office, so those criminal perpetrators will understand advocates are not alone.

In the construction of the Campaign's plans, it has been part of the debate the proposition of instruments to protect activists. From guidelines and manuals, to thinking about how to configure other protection elements, but also the articulation that we have been doing in regional and local committees with other institutions. When we created, a couple of years ago, the manual against the "Movimento Escola Sem Partido" (Movement for Apolitical Schools), we were giving, in a more discrete fashion, content that activists often not know. Examples of what we have done or can do to protect activists is **bring in a piratical way what is in various legal basis or to explain why such legal basis protects advocates from being attacked.**

Another essential element is that we have an open and constant dialogue with activists, not only to protect them, but also to train them and bring more of them to the field of action. The work is increasing each day more, people get tired, get sick, and activists are not necessarily professionals for that field activity. Building a growing activists network is also very important for our survival.

We have increased the violations exposure, in a world that is improving its exclusion criteria. And how do we look at how violations reach different groups in different ways? We cannot think in the same way about machismo over white and black women, over women from the city and the countryside, or over black women who occupy different spaces in society. We need to have these different perspectives over these groups of activists in all the spaces, and every time we go to different places, we bring more different voices, we know new problems or problems that are triggered in different ways to those we are used to deal with. Bringing this into the training process, bringing more people to this group of activists, increases the possibility to more people to be protected or that we will fight for more rights. **If inequality has so many faces, the fight against it needs to be performed in different ways.**



# Cláudia Pinho

## Rede de Comunidades Tradicionais Pantaneiras



I'm Cláudia Pinho,  
"Coordenadora Regional de Cáceres (MT) da Rede de Comunidades Tradicionais Pantaneiras"  
(Regional Coordinator for the municipality of Cáceres (MT) with the Traditional Communities Network of Pantanal). The self-affirmation of Pantanal communities is an identity of a specific group in the Pantanal region.

As coordinator and representative of the Network, I served in the presidency of the "Conselho Nacional de Povos e Comunidades Tradicionais" (National Council of Traditional Peoples and Communities) and I am currently a counsellor in this space; I am also on the "Conselho Gestor de Patrimônio Genético e Proteção dos Conhecimentos Tradicionais" (Management Council for Genetic Heritage and Protection of Traditional Knowledge). These are spaces where we have placed the most national-related agendas and the demands from the groups. I am also part of the articulation of the "Rede de Povos e Comunidades Tradicionais do Brasil" (Network for Traditional Peoples and Communities of Brazil), with the operational nucleus of this network.



## How do you assess **the struggle of resistance and the confrontation of human rights violations** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

The pandemic has placed these groups that recognize themselves as traditional peoples and communities in a greater situation of vulnerability because it has greatly strengthened the unbalance, especially with regard to vested rights.

The emergence of the pandemic started in urban centres initially, and it's been, little by little, taking over traditional territories and, even when it happened in urban centres, this macro-policy of health care was already lacking in traditional territories for a long time. The pandemic brought this information about how precarious is health care in the territories; in some cases it is non-existent. **Many communities do not even have a Basic Health Care Unit ("Posto de Saúde"), for primary attention.**

So, the self-organization of traditional peoples and communities has been the best response to the pandemic in terms of self-care or collective care. We have several examples of communities that self-organized themselves as an attempt of not allowing the virus to enter their territories, some groups even returning to a more natural or primitive lifestyle; we have several testimonies of indigenous peoples that moved into the forest to heal.

The Covid-19 pandemic came to bring some answers not only for traditional peoples and communities, but also for society as a whole and much more for the Brazilian State. **It is a way of acknowledging that the State is not playing its part in these territories and has left traditional peoples and communities in a situation of vulnerability.** We have many cases in which the Brazilian government does not comply with public policies, which has left traditional peoples and communities on their own and made them to seek for self-organization. We are talking about centuries of State absence on health care and government decisions had further intensified the vulnerability of these groups.

When the president does not sign the decree of prioritization of basic care for traditional peoples and communities, he is denying what is already established in the Constitution. Actually, it was an attack on our rights to exist and to have access to public policies that the rest of society already has. Amongst 21 articles, 15 were vetoed. It is a non-precedent issue, especially with the government intensifying this asymmetry of access to public policies at such a critical and decisive moment for traditional peoples and communities.

## How do you assess the fights **to carry out the promotion and achievement of human rights** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

We were already experiencing difficult political situation in this country and the issue of the pandemic brings even more burden on this matter of vested rights, increasing of inequalities. You are part of a group entitled to rights, but in practice rights have not been implemented. It brings this message that the fight for human rights, for collective rights, is far from the end. The pandemic lays bare the concept that we all have the same rights, but in practice it is all very unequal. It brings many lessons in this context, because if you have survival, protection, and self-affirmation strategies for critical moments, it is a sign that your strength and the strengths of the collectives are much greater.

On the other hand, it is because of this acknowledgement about rights not being equal that an understanding about the need of a much more intense fight for rights to be effective at the bottom part of the pyramid, in the forgotten localities of the Amazon, in the most distant sites of the Pantanal. It puts us in a situation where we **cannot let our guard down in the rights fulfilment.** And on the matter of human rights, which is very broad matter, this pandemic context is the awakening of an awareness that already existed, but that we had no idea how much it effectively impacted the life of communities, the good living that communities stand for and have been seeking for a long time.

# In your opinion, **what are the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic** on the work of human rights advocates?

**We, traditional peoples and communities, human rights advocates**, have been confronted with concepts such as, for example, sustainable development, ecological agriculture, within a context. For us, the purpose of human rights advocates is the defence of life in general, not only human life, but advocacy for life in a broader context, because we are inserted in this comprehensive environment where we are just another living being.

We people from the communities already had a difficult situation and many Pantanal communities were already socially isolated. This isolation was very convenient for the State not to see the communities and, to make things worse, wildfires happened in the Pantanal region in a period of a severe drought. Imagine, a community that lives in the largest wetland in the world, with a backyard full of biodiversity, suddenly finding itself in a situation of not having anything to put on the table, not having anything to feed children, being obligated to appeal for charity, for example. And many only asked for help for staple food when the situation has gotten very, very serious. The pandemic imposed a lot of suffering, we lost people, but the situation of wildfires and severe drought in the Pantanal much more violent, considering the bigger picture, in other words, more challenging and came to expose how vulnerable communities are.

The pandemic and all these situations in the last two years have put us into action to look for things that we never needed to look for, it is a new way of preserving life, of resisting in the territory. This made us to raise a lot the flag that in the Pantanal there are people, there are traditional communities, and these communities have never needed public policies as much as they do need now. And the Brazilian State has to take care of this because it is its duty and this has been neglected all these years.

We offer opposition to this current setting in the Pantanal. With this very beautiful area, with large mammals, but also with people who have been reaping the consequences of this pandemic period and such difficult times to keep fighting for livelihood, resisting and, above all, to keep living in the Pantanal. We have been working hard on this issue so that communities are aware of their rights, as the demand has never been stronger than it is now: you know you are entitled to rights, but they are not being provided to you, and this is called violations of human rights, just essential and basic, for the existence of any group and especially of these communities.

The pandemic opens the curtain that for a long time did not allow us to see the groups in a situation of vulnerability. We are talking about leaders who may have to do with human rights because they advocate for life, territory, and life in general. And how did this increase during the pandemic? We have several examples: **the self-organization that I mentioned requires the group to have someone for the self-organization conduction, but when this is mentioned, almost every time, it should be proposed by the leadership that has the support of the community and the possibilities to seek alternatives for the territory.**

Thus, we see that during the pandemic these people were even more vulnerable because they were the ones who went to down-town, did the shopping, did the articulation to obtain some service and, more recently, access to the vaccine. The possibility of being contaminated with the virus and spread it in the community caused insecurity, as we knew what we were dealing with and did not have the support and necessary conditions to address or mitigate the problems caused by the pandemic in the territories.

# Would you have suggestions for strategies to strengthen networking and carry out the popular protection of human rights advocates from the Covid-19 pandemic?

The best strategy we could identify had to do with the matter of collectivity. It was never as strong as during the pandemic and we were never so clearly aware that it is necessary to gather as collective, to belong to the community, because these are the experiences of the elder ones and the hope of the younger ones that give us a purpose for these difficult times. The self-organization strategies of traditional territories have highlighted this: it is necessary to be united, it is necessary to show empathy for the pain, care about the others. These issues are very strong and the communities that came together to seek a solution for their territories, especially against the virus and in prevention, so that no one could be contaminated, makes a survival strategy, but it is also a strategy of putting themselves in someone else's shoes.

I strongly believe that the best side of people, emotions, when shared in a group, reach a greater tier, achieving more significant advancements. In this sense, we saw many solidarity networks, networks that were born during the pandemic and others that have been strengthened. It is necessary to be together in the sense of counting on each other to establish partnerships and seek for solutions. When it comes to public policies, seeking rights, and basic things too, putting food on the table. When we work together, in partnership, we can strengthen ourselves.

In my opinion, the message that comes from the pandemic is that we cannot isolate ourselves, but to seek solutions together, even if we are all in different spaces, being able to count on organizations, on people who are really sensitive to the differences, emphasizing the access to rights, to social constitution and to the contributions of traditional peoples and communities, not highlighting the aspect of the differences, prejudice, and exclusion. The pandemic brings us this as food for thought: **it is necessary to show empathy, to gather together, to seek for the rights to be each day more fulfilled.**



# Denise Dora

## Artigo 19



**My name is Denise Dourado Dora, I am an attorney-at-law and I have been working in the field of human rights for many years.**

I'm from Rio Grande do Sul, I worked for many years in the "Vale dos Sinos" region with labour unions in the footwear, clothing, chemical, metallurgical, and banking sectors. This was a very important experience, it was the foundation of my political, personal and professional life. I had come from the activism with the student and feminist movements. I started my undergraduate course at university in the beginning of the 1980s and I helped to create one of the first student feminist groups, named Liberta.

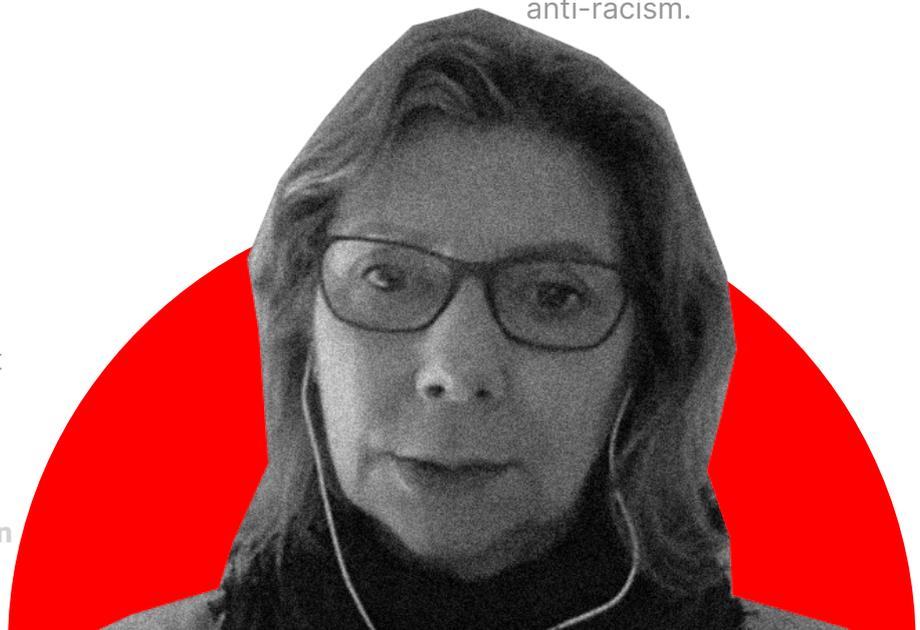
I come from this activism with the feminist movement, the student movement and, working with the labour unions, I realized that I had a very intense labour-related agenda, but also a further agenda: the issue of moral harassment and sexual harassment in the footwear companies, where the workers were mostly women and the better ranked employees were male; the issue of child labour; the issues regarding labour union's inside relationships. During this period, I also contributed a little to the construction of the "Comissão de Mulheres Trabalhadoras da Central Única dos Trabalhadores" (Committee of Working Women of the Workers Central Hub - CUT), made up of women from the "Partido dos Trabalhadores" (Workers' Party - PT), to which I was affiliated at that time. This progressively led

me to work with the subject of human rights, to understand that the scope of my professional practice was part of a much broader framework: the human rights framework.

I went to work more with the subject of human rights and that led me to participate in the creation, together with some colleagues, in 1993, of an organization called Themis, which works with access to justice for women. We created a program that is now very well known in Brazil, the so-called "Promotoras Legais Populares" (Popular Legal Attorneys), and starting there, I went to work for women. In my daily practice, I used to deal with violence, harassment, reproductive health, so I spent the entire 1990s directly dedicated to these matters, providing consultation. It was a very difficult moment, because there was not yet the so-called "Lei Maria da Penha" (Maria da Penha Act) and we had to build defence mechanisms and the human rights matter was a cross-cutting theme because there was indeed the idea of how to hold the State accountable for something that was happening inside people's homes, how we could rethink this framework of

the public policy, of the law. The case of Mrs. Maria da Penha itself arises as a result of this broad debate, which in the 1990s took in account a certain conference that approved the idea that women's rights are also human rights. And then, in the following decade, I worked as a coordinator in the area of human rights at the "Fundação Ford Brasil" (Ford Brazil Foundation) and, from 2000 to 2011, I could travel across the whole country, getting to know the issues that involved, for example, the emergence of a strong brand new indigenous movement; the consolidation of the new generation of organizations for the black; the debate on affirmative actions in Brazil; the creation of a greater infrastructure for human rights, the "Fundo Brasil de Direitos Humanos" (Brazilian Human Rights Fund); academic master's educational programs; also all the new organizations.

After I left the foundation in 2011, I continued to work with human rights as an attorney and I am currently the regional director for "Artigo 19", an organization for the freedom of speech. And there we have four decades of work and activism on human rights, feminism and anti-racism.



# How do you assess **the resistance effort and the confrontation of human rights violations** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

Perhaps it was one of the toughest moments in the struggle for human rights, for two reasons. We had been experiencing a very intense growth process since 2016, at least, when President Dilma passed through the impeachment and there have been a re-articulation of extremely conservative forces in the whole country, to take back the power over the federal state, doing all this in a fraudulent way. We saw the reorganization of these forces that led to Bolsonaro's election. This coalition of militias and military, with the financial market, with large companies that speculate on natural resources, with a large, more traditional and conservative evangelical sector, and with a huge share of the population confused by a series of fake news, and indeed by the judicial processes of the "Operação Lava-Jato" (Operation Car-Wash).

It has been a very unusual situation, because **the years of 2016, 2017 and 2018 were three years that we can compare to a train colliding with a construction that had been carefully carried out since the early 1980s, since the transition from the military dictatorship.** And then we had a year under Bolsonaro, the year of 2019, with that destruction of the foundations of the democratic rule of law – he had the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Culture closed, he began to destroy the State apparatus, trying to

approve Bills in the National Congress that were unfavourable, destroying systems of regulation and environmental protection. And we were dealing with that when the pandemic arrived. And then it was horrible because, on the one hand, a pandemic by itself weakens human relationships and puts people in a situation of struggle for survival, absolutely defensive. All this in a context of an extremely destructive federal government, compromising public welfare and the minimally established social and economic order in Brazil. It was a terrible experience.

This immediately created two effects: on the one hand, it made the Brazilian population even more vulnerable, which was already losing many rights in the field of education, equality, equity, because at that time it had to rely on a public health resource that was not available to operate. This made everyone much more fragile, including to react to what the Bolsonaro government was doing in relation to the pandemic itself: the control of information, manipulation, the attempt to make money with the vaccine. Everything bad and criminal that could be done, they did. And, on the other hand, they demanded from civil society, which was organizing itself to react to this government, a high level of resilience, strength, quality, creativity.

# How do you assess the fights **to carry out the promotion and achievement of human rights** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

In this super-complex context, it is incredible to see the ability of organizations to reinvent themselves and their relationships and solidarity. An agenda of fights has been reorganized, which required a lot of creativity. For example: the housing movement, in an attempt to stop evictions during the pandemic, filed a lawsuit in the Supreme Court, obtained an injunction and created a super interesting fighting tool to prevent social absurd from becoming greater. Another example was the government's attempt to reduce access to information, but organizations quickly gathered together to react, to file a lawsuit.

There were many initiatives in the National Congress to reduce the scope of civil society action:

the National Security Bill, the Anti-Terrorism Bill and even the Fake News Bill contained some very bad provisions. **And there was a great movement of Brazilian society around solidarity, a horizontal solidarity,** which we experienced with Betinho, in the 1980s, with the "Ação da Cidadania" (Citizenship Action), a great civic, social action, pulled by civil society to combat extreme poverty, hunger, which ended up generating protocols, milestones, creation of programs, the "Conselho de Segurança Alimentar" (Food Security Council) for instance – which has been ended by Bolsonaro –, a series of policies on the subject. So, what we saw again was the resumption of an articulation around solidarity and survival.



Organizations, from within, began to think about how they can transform these resources for the public they work with. I can give the example of cell phone chips donated to more than 500 professional housekeepers to have access to information, to have data on their cell phones, because it was the category that suffered the most, losing jobs. With the "Promotoras Legais Populares", also, donation of food parcels, cell phone chips.

Civil society reinvented ways of communicating, assembling self-help groups. Covid-19 brought a very important agenda, which is the recovery of the idea of humanitarian aid and support for the treatment of poverty, misery, inequality and promoted the invention of a creative way to take the struggle agendas and transform them during the pandemic so that they could produce new tools.

## In your opinion, **what are the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic** on the work of human rights advocates?

Advocates have been demanded to have a very high level of courage and resilience. **We saw many companions dying from Covid-19, and it was horrible.** We had to protect ourselves from the virus. So, how are you going to do a job, for example, supporting women in situations of house-to-house violence, which you usually do, if with this job you will possibly be able to spread the virus, or be contaminated, or die... It was very difficult, it has been a huge challenge to think about how to take care of yourself, and this is an interesting thing because the human rights movement brings, within its agenda, the matter about self-care, of rethinking ways of working that are not exhaustive, that are not destructive.

We have also a lot of courage involved, because the Bolsonaro's government attacks human rights advocates as a group; it is a violent, misogynistic, equality-hating government. So whenever you react, in very simple things, like posting something on social media, you are under the risk of being attacked by a horde of hateful robots, also your relatives, exposing pictures, invading your

accounts, etc. We passed through this and we are passing through it now. For Artigo 19 it is very important because amongst our themes we have information security, freedom of speech, and we see that this neo-fascism tries to capture the idea of freedom in its own way. They start a messy debate of about freedom of speech is and what speeches of hatred are and put everyone at an absurd level of vulnerability. A woman who occasionally offend Bolsonaro on the street will be arrested by the Federal Highway Police, answer to a formal inquiry; a faculty writes an article of opinion criticizing decisions and is sued. So it takes a lot of individual courage from people to expose themselves, to keep moving.

And the third aspect has been this issue of self-care, courage, this kind of intelligence that was created, a collective, solidarity intelligence, to think in other ways, to be very creative, to articulate with other movements. This also required much more. So, in no way we are going to keep doing things as we used to.

# Would you have suggestions for strategies to strengthen networking and carry out the popular protection of human rights advocates from the Covid-19 pandemic?

The pandemic is not gone. There is no post-pandemic. **We are going to live in a pandemic world for a while and scientists are warning us about that.** The other day, a study from an university has been published reporting that the type of treatment used for Covid weakens our immunities to superbacteria, so we may be more vulnerable to other bacteria. I think the first element of the experience is for us to rethink biosafety standards and what we are currently doing.

For example, in my house, two years ago, we became vegetarians. We stopped eating meat, we will no longer give money to this predatory livestock industry. There are many studies showing that deforestation brings wild animals into contact with domestic animals, which are eaten by humans and this is an element of virus migration to mammals that do not have the immunity to deal with them and from mammalian animals to humans, who have even less immunity.

So they're saying, "Look, guys, you're doing a deal that leads to death, are you sure?" I think this requires the human rights movement to embrace the environmental agenda, in the sense of the survival of the planet, of the survival of humanity, in a radical way. The defence of the Earth, of our ecosystem, biosecurity issues, have to be addressed by this entire structure of human rights, institutions, commissions – national and international – and the movement itself, so that we can have a breath of life, of survival.

That's a big lesson. It's not over, it won't be over. It's another world and we have to rethink this matter, we can't just postpone it any longer. Eliane Brum states something very interesting, which is about the "good denialists", which are all of us, who continued to deny that something horrible that was happening with climate changes and the pandemic and we continue to buy meat at the supermarket, buying clothes, things beyond that we need.

So, I think there has to be a breakthrough of all the knowledge, of the practices that we really need to do. The other thing is experience has taught us more about relationships within the organizations, the movements. A standard of care, of kindness, among all human rights activists, how to assemble a field work that is more careful, affective, less competitive, to face this strong neo-fascist wave.

At the same time, we see what happened in Honduras, the first black, socialist woman wins the elections; the independence of Barbados. So, the world is moving and I think we have to align ourselves politically, but also ethically, with the best of it.

There are many studies in history showing that changes in people's behaviour have a very strong impact and I think that understanding this from the journeys is very nice. For instance, the feminist movement has been built over big demonstrations and so on, but it has been built mainly with the change of women's attitude at home, with their daughters, their sons, their partnerships, in their daily routine. **And I think that for us to learn how people reorganized their lives and continued advocating during the pandemic process is very important.** So, congratulations on doing this data raising!

# Diva Santana

## Grupo Tortura Nunca Mais da Bahia



**I am Diva Santana and my advocacy in the “Grupo Tortura Não Mais - GTNM” in the state of Bahia dates back to the time of the amnesty after Brazilian dictatorship.**

In addition to being an activist, I am a relative of a political missing person and I am an advisor to the “Comissão Especial sobre Mortos e Desaparecidos Políticos” (Special Commission on Political Dead and Missing - Federal Law no. 9.140/1995) which was largely changed by the federal government. The work has cooled off, we’ve only had three or four meetings since Dr. Eugênia Gonzaga and part of the team were dismissed.

The advocacy for human rights consists of the basic principles of a society that has its elementary rights assured. The impoverishment of our people, social inequality, the lack of opportunities for more equal coexistence, the defence of democracy and structured policies to generate opportunities, guaranteeing everyone’s right to a good education, health care, employment, leisure, etc., are violations that lead me to fight in defence and promotion of the most diverse social segments affected.

There are several fronts of fight in the GTNM, in spite of the breadth of the defence of human rights and the violations of these rights to various social

segments, such as the fight against torture, against police violence, which are constant demands, especially in the communities from the periphery, where the poor and black people are affected. In the field of education and general knowledge, we are demanded to give lectures in schools about violence and the military dictatorship.

The GTNM has a broad participation in discussions related to society. For example: we are currently part of a commission that discusses the contribution to the new Chilean constitution; we made a presentation and discussion about the film “Marighella”, with people who fight in defence of memory, truth and justice, and in defence of democracy; memory

of Brazilians who were persecuted, killed, many disappeared. I worked for almost 20 years in the Witness Protection Program, since its creation in the state of Bahia. As a member of the GTNM, I participated in the discussion process for the constitution of this public policy that unfortunately, today, we don’t know if it’s being applied. We work with social networks in Bahia and in other states, promoting workshops, particularly with members of the third sector, with a view to promoting the network of protectors.



# How do you assess **the struggle of resistance and the confrontation of human rights violations** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

In this period of four years, our country is going through a mismanagement that, among other absurd, denies the principle of Science, promotes chaos, leading to social lack of control to prevention, and disregard publicly the virus risks. In the face of the denialist discourse, for not knowing science, civil society has been acting with constraints, and only with many programs of the State and Municipalities, drawing the population's attention to the need for vaccination.

Despite the efforts of the state governments, the vaccine arrived very late, which led to many deaths, especially among the elderly. In the State of Bahia, the governor, some municipal governments and other organizations made efforts with policies of psychosocial support for families, creating groups in universities, hospitals, schools, promoting care for victims of the virus.

## How do you assess the fights **to carry out the promotion and achievement of human rights** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

Considering the limitations of exposure, we used the Internet as an instrument, through live broadcasting, together with popular associations and providing general service with the guidelines. We demanded a lot from the public authorities (state and municipalities) to provide care to the victims, not only to those who were contaminated, but also to their families.

The resistance struggle continues, especially in the face of denialism imposed by the President of the Republic and his followers, for a new reality for the country that demands immediate responses from the public authorities aiming to save lives. **Our struggle with society, basically the most needy portion, takes place with the support in the sense of guidance and solidarity.**

**However, State intervention is necessary, with public policies.**

Faced with confinement, when addressing the demands it was not possible to go in-person. However, a means was used for the follow-up with the guidance work: how to prevent, how to seek health means for those who were contaminated.

**This demand for follow-up continues with families who lost their beloved ones and those who are suffering from sequelae.** The thousands of victims, as well as helpless people, orphans, must be accompanied by the government, making it possible to guarantee psychosocial care, housing, employment, etc., which will require civil society mobilization.

## In your opinion, **what are the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic** on the work of human rights advocates?

The measures to prevent the spreading of the virus, at least in the State of Bahia, were correct, which led to social distancing, which also made more difficult in-person initiatives.

I participated of the Bahia State Council for Human Rights and, during the pandemic peak, we held several meetings to meet the demands of infected people and their families; We sought, through live broadcasting, to offer some support, medical and social guidance. We face the pandemic, the flu, and now the rainfall in Bahia.

After the rainfall season, diseases will arrive, especially in a period when we are seeing the mutation of the Covid-19 virus. The dengue fever vector (the mosquito) also serves as a vector for chikungunya and other dangerous and contagious diseases, and the most affected population is that one in the most vulnerable areas. The intervention of civil society must, among other initiatives, demand from the public authorities the assistance to those affected, assuring and enabling the health assistance, assuring education services with the vaccination of students and also assuring their social activities (school, leisure, etc.).



## **Would you have suggestions for strategies to strengthen networking and carry out the popular protection of human rights advocates from the Covid-19 pandemic?**

With the arrival of the third shot of the vaccine (although some people have been contaminated anyway), we have more safety to work around. Human rights advocates have always faced difficulties in strengthening the fight for the defence and promotion of rights.

Through public policies, society will be able to replicate the creation and strengthening of networks, based on the protection and promotion of human rights, for protectors or educators to have full capacity in the various areas, promoting the security and the assurance of rights.

The strengthening of this network also takes place with the public policies. To the protectors, at least a training about the defence of rights, the promotion and assurance of citizenship, the consolidation of education, health, leisure, etc., especially for segments totally deprived of some information. **It is necessary and urgent is the promotion of education for the more excluded population, mainly on information.**

People are unaware of their rights and the ways to assure them, even though they have empirical knowledge: the lessons from the streets. Voting is one of the most important elements for building democracy and, due to lack of knowledge about its importance, it is sometimes traded for the payment of an electricity bill. And the network has this role as an opinion maker.

I see the third sector with a relevant role in government controlling, aiming at social assistance for all. I am hopeful, but also ready to fight, to guarantee the election and the control by a government that can properly rule this country. **Whoever takes over will get a scorched earth: almost everything sold to the private initiative, a destructed labour rights policy.**

I hope that we advance in the fight, may we fight the Covid-19 virus, may the children be vaccinated. I look forward to keep fighting, always defending people's rights. Brazilian society has a National Human Rights Program, which is the PNDH-3. It is necessary to guarantee its application and fight against the decision of the Minister in charge, Mrs. Damares, who wants to change it.

# Eduardo Siqueira de Oliveira

## Conselho Indigenista Missionário (CIMI)



**I'm Antônio Eduardo Siqueira de Oliveira, from the southern region of Bahia. I joined CIMI in 1989, working with the Pataxo Há Há Hãe people, in the south of Bahia, in the municipalities of Pau Brasil, Camacã and Itaju do Colônia.**

**I practically graduated myself in this fight.** A fight in which the people had as a political determination the return to the territory that was invaded in the 1930s and 1940s.

Afterwards, the title deed was issued by the government of the State of Bahia in a native Indian territory. In this process of expulsion, there was a lot of violence, many deaths, promoted by the public power of the State through the military police and mercenaries hired by the agribusiness farmers, with military and paramilitary infrastructure to expel the indigenous people from that territory. They returned to the territory in 1982 and restarted a complicated process of fighting to settle in a small recovered area and, at the same time, expanding their participation and presence in the territory. To this end, they began a fight process in the legal system instance with a lawsuit demanding to make not valid some title deeds in the administrative sphere, so that the federal government would assume the assistance and take responsibility over this community through FUNAI and through their own initiatives to reclaim the territory. A fight to recover the territory that lasted 28 years and throughout this struggle I made part of the Indigenous Missionary Council (CIMI) and also as an activist for the indigenous cause, for the social movements and also

advocating for human rights, because what was at stake there was the physical integrity of an entire population and the respect for human beings.

The Pataxó Há Há Hãe survived in an extremely unfavourable way. There was physical, psychological conflict and even financial and economic conflict over food, since the land they initially took back did not provide the possibility of agriculture. It has been a fight with several casualties. More than 16 indigenous leaders were killed in direct conflicts, letting alone those who died due to the consequences of the conflicts, especially the psychological consequences.

I have been trained in this process of conflicts and later I participated in several other struggles in the regional level, that involves not only the State of Bahia, but also Minas Gerais and Espírito Santo. I had the opportunity to advise on other struggles and other projects, including the most recent one, of the Tupinambá de Olivença people, where we started in the year 2000. We re-established

contact and I was the first to enter the area with some communities that used to work for the agribusiness and then we helped in the entire process of internal articulation so that the people would come to be respected as an indigenous people and then they would assume their identity as Tupinambá. Then, the opportunity to discuss the matter of retaking their territories and all the internal organization and external articulation with other powers, more directly with the Serra do Padeiro locality, with Cacique Babau. We had several initiatives and he was even included in the protection program several times due to the intensification of the fighting within the region. With him, we took part in the visit of the human rights staff and also the staff from the State Secretariat and from the Council itself, which has been created by the movement and offered a very important support for their cause. This is just a bit of my background of 33 years participating in the CIMI.



# How do you assess **the struggle of resistance and the confrontation of human rights violations** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

The pandemic brought consequences for everyone and all for all the fights in Brazil. In the meantime between 2019 and 2020, when this pandemic arrived, we had to readjust and we also had to stay in expectation, because we were anxious to be close to the communities, to the leaders, but the pandemic impeded us. **And the enemy did not practice social distancing.**

Traditional, indigenous and quilombola populations, who suffer more from this attack on their rights, were impacted by the pandemic, by the invasion of territories and also by violence, as there has been a serious situation with the Military Police in supporting the invasion of territories, in supporting those who are enemies for the human rights advocates. And today, a fear felling is disseminated over the countryside because violence has been made usual, or better saying, it has been planned or redesigned as a result of the federal government's position that encourages weaponry, gun possession and the use of weapons against this population.

So, the human rights advocates were trapped without being able to leave, they were harassed by this military and paramilitary power, due to the dismantling of the protection organs. Law has been completely left aside and all the dialogue with the municipal, state and federal governments have stopped and we could not be with them. We will have to resume this process, but we don't know under which conditions, despite the personal effort of the staff and many programs continuation. In 2020, I participated in several meetings for the project "Defendendo Vidas", with the "Sociedade Maranhense de Direitos Humanos" (Society of Human Rights of the state of Maranhão), whose main objective is to protect advocates. I also participated in the discussion of proposals for the renewal of this project with Misereor and of this larger one, "Sementes de Proteção". I find these initiatives extremely important. These actors continued to defend the advocates and if it wasn't for that the tragedy would have been greater.

But, bottom line, the pandemic brought these consequences because the enemies did not stop, they continued and, on the contrary, strengthened themselves and imposed a situation of isolation over human rights advocates because the violence has been amplified. The so-called rural pastorals assembled a commission of traditional populations and we had in-person meetings where several representatives of traditional communities reported terrible situations of violence resulting from this government's development project, agribusiness, in short, all the impact over rural areas. A very worrying situation is that of western Bahia, with the group of states called MATOPIBA (the acronyms of Maranhão, Tocantins, Piauí and Bahia). It is an agribusiness, development project, with the support of the state government, which has perpetrating actions of extreme violence against populations, against leaders, and which is also violence against human rights advocates.

**I reiterate: the resistance of these communities, of these advocates, is fundamental to our work, as they are the ones who give us courage, keep us on this pathway towards life defence, for a healthier environment, a better world.** They are the ones who carry out this struggle and this resistance to remain in their territories in a collective, solidarity way. They are the ones who give us the purpose to maintain the struggle both in urban and rural spaces, who drive us in our struggle and in our solidarity action in the perspective of a better world.

We can do this in many ways, but in practice they are our advocates, we are not advocating for them. Therefore, this resistance, this cry for help has to be heard because without them our fight is meaningless. We don't have to keep theorizing, there are practical issues that need to be addressed, to be taken care of in relation to indigenous populations, traditional populations, quilombolas, the poor boroughs of urban centres.

# How do you assess the fights to carry out the promotion and achievement of human rights in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

This action of the advocates acquires further meaning in this conjuncture because we were impacted by a government that came with an approach that no political, social, or economic analyst had the slightest idea about. Of course, we already had elements of what the Bolsonaro government would be, what it could be his personality heading a federal government.

And what happened in 2019 and 2020 was much worse than we anticipated: **the dismantling the State structures, the destruction of the hope of the Brazilian people.** Therefore, the need for these programs, these fights, this articulation. And our support is fundamental within this context. It becomes vital because the impacts of this government are terrible. Therefore, this back these advocates up is fundamental, as we were impacted by the pandemic and we are being impacted by the dismantling carried out by the government.

**More than 620,000 (Dec/2021) people deceased reflects government's actions.** This will be difficult to recover within the families mourning for their dead, in the apparatus of protection for these families, in the dismantling of the State, and of the entire apparatus for social protection. When I refer to the State, I am talking about the Executive, the Legislative, and the Judiciary, which seem to be completely disconnected from Brazilian people's real life. It is reported that institutions are working, but they are not. The only ones that are working, at least, are the institutions providing social work, caring about our advocates, our fighters. It's the least we can do and it's an issue that impacts us, it impacted everyone and we're going to need readjustment and adaptation. We have to be like potters to fix this broken jar and to fix ourselves, as we are all broken in this reality.

We took part in the Human Rights Commission of the Congress to deal with the situation of two Yanomami children who were swallowed by dredgers that are exploring for gold in their territory. **There are 25,000 miners in the region and the population is starving because they cannot leave their villages to hunt, to fish, because they suffer from the miners' acts of violence.**

The Minister of Justice and the president of FUNAI were in that session of the Chamber's Human Rights Commission, and his argument was that the situation of the Yanomami is Venezuela's fault. Then the congresspeople who were there, from the government's base, the military generals, elected police officers, called the indigenous people lazy, who are hungry and dying because they don't work; that it is a lot of land for a few indigenous individuals and that the miners are bringing progress to the country. These people make part of the Human Rights Commission of the Federal Congress, but they are not concerned with human lives.

The indigenous people representatives present got angry and started a fight. Security arrived and the session got adjourned. In certain situations, unfortunately, the outrage is so great that leads to this kind of reaction. This is the general situation we are experiencing in Brazil and this government made it worse. We are making the necessary assessments so that we can fix this broken jar and we shall be able to fix Brazil as well. We are also speaking sided with our advocates who are much more broken and in need of our support, our help, because these threats go directly over them in a context of a complex process that has been much worse than we could imagined.

# In your opinion, **what are the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic** on the work of human rights advocates?

It was distressing. In several places, there were situations that our people who were at the front end couldn't stop: **"look, if we're going to stay here, we'll also be agreeing with this project of death"**. The indigenous people also said: **"look, you are not here, but the government is, so the neo-Pentecostal churches, the great business projects as well, they have not stopped and they are working directly for the division of the communities"**. This was an element that the pandemic brought: they invested massively in promoting discord, especially within the indigenous movement. So, our lack of participation made this proposal to foster much more disagreement, carried out mainly by the neo-Pentecostals. They greatly intensified this process, as these churches work on a political project that is the same carried out by the government, by the power of the capital.

It has been a very anguishing situation for us, then in July/2020 we reunited the Council and decided to return, because the harm is too great. The miners in the territory of the Munduruku did not stop, they continued causing tragedy and they forced the Brazilian Federal Police to leave the territory. The Yanomami face terrible situations in the state of Roraima in the "Raposa Serra do Sol" reserve; there are problems in the state of Mato Grosso and Maranhão; in other words, it was an avalanche of threats that made the situation of these communities to get worse. It was a terrible personal impact for us not to be able to be with them. Now we get back to work with all the necessary measures due to the pandemic, but we know we need to start from scratch in many situations, assess the extent of losses, because it's been two years of work. We've made an effort to keep personal contact, but it's not been enough. At first, it met our monitoring requirements, but it has not been enough because of the sense of discord implemented within the community. **Even access to the vaccine has been complicated.**

## **Would you have suggestions for strategies to strengthen networking** and carry out the popular protection of human rights advocates from the **Covid-19 pandemic?**

Although we have several initiatives in the sense of a networking initiative, I consider that we still have constraints. It is obvious that Brazil is big and there is a need for better coordination in this area of human rights. CIMI participates in the National Human Rights Council (CNDH), in the National Human Rights Movement (MNDH), so there are many initiatives in place, but sometimes we have the feeling that these initiatives do not come group together and they turn out to weaken us. I think there is a need to articulate a network without extrapolating the autonomy of the respective movements, of the institutions, but it is important that we qualify this dialogue and that we have our main objective as a goal, which is people at the base.

**We need to focus more on the base, we need to see how we go back to this more direct, more essential, more fundamental element.**

Therefore, I think we have a lot to talk about, and we have to put aside certain individualities and specificities and work on what makes us stronger. Leaving aside what weakens us, because the enemy is common for we all, it is the great capital that is destroying nature, solidarity between human beings, the perspective of collectivity, of diversity. So we have to unite more in a more political proposition, not so much structural, not economic, aiming more on what glues us in terms of solidarity and collectivity and putting aside some differences that sometimes harm us.

We fight a project of death in the broader field and, sometimes, without realizing it, we are also strengthening the project in the micro field, in our organizations.



# Elisety Veiga Maia

## Movimento de Mulheres do Campo e da Cidade (PA)



**I'm Elisety Veiga Maia, from the state of Pará, I've graduated in History, I'm a popular educator, I work in several popular education projects with the method from Paulo Freire and education in human rights.**

I am currently active in the "Movimento de Mulheres do Campo e da Cidade" (Women's Movement of the City and of the Countryside), with a specific theme on the issue of feminism, the struggle of women and their health, the issue about the territory.

I have been president for the "Conselho Estadual de Políticas para as Mulheres do Pará" (State of Pará Council of Policies for Women) in two terms. I am part of the "Projeto Educar e Resistir por Direitos Humanos" (Project Educate and Resist for Human Rights) in the Amazon region, a human rights network in the state of Pará, coordinated by the "Sociedade Paraense de Direitos Humanos" (State of Pará Society for Human Rights - SDDH), of which I am a representative in the national executive of the "Associação Brasileira de Organizações Não Governamentais" (Brazilian Association of Non-Governmental Organizations - Abong) and in the national coordination of the "Movimento Nacional de Direitos Humanos" (National Human Rights Movement - MNDH Brazil).



## How do you assess **the resistance effort and the confrontation of human rights violations** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

I will talk more about the Amazon region, our territory. Our resistance has been made of a lot of fight. Two years ago, we created the “Rede Amazônica de Solidariedade” (Amazon Solidarity Network), together with people from the churches councils, CPT, CIMI, Cedeca, Unipop, MST, Malungo, people connected to Abong, to raise funds to donate food to indigenous populations, riverside women, fishermen, quilombolas, LGBTIQA+, single women householders. This struggle for resistance was very important.

**The other big scenario was the issue of criminalization.** In the region, and especially in Pará, criminalization and violations continued, even with the pandemic:

**several murders, evictions of agrarian reform settlers, not to mention the indigenous issue.** Another part of the Project Educar e Resistir, in addition to capacity building, is the follow-up of cases, in defence of these workers. It is a network – MAB, CPT, SDDH, Cedeca – that has been monitoring these situations of violations perpetrated by the miners, soybean producers, which the projects to occupy the Amazon, that have worsened during the pandemic. The state of Pará was the one that suffered the most with deforestation, even with the pandemic process, as official reports reveal. This is very serious. In addition to this, there are floods and conflicts in the southern, southeastern and western regions of Pará.

## How do you assess the fights **to carry out the promotion and achievement of human rights** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

**We have become more and more solidarity.** Even with the social distancing, without having all the staff working in the institutions, we didn't stop. What we could do working from home, we did, but we continue to go to the territories because each case of violations shall not be left unpunished. At least, only the report. We know that it takes years and years for a lawsuit to be conducted in court procedures for a case like this, but we'll not

remain in silence. And the solidarity network is strengthened. The SDDH is part of the “Conselho de Segurança Pública” (Public Security Council – along with Cedeca, Cedenpa, Movimento Emaús, CNBB – and it has not stopped, it has not bowed to these increasingly serious violations. This last crime (murder of environmentalists), indeed in São Félix, where practically a whole family was killed, it's very barbaric.

# In your opinion, **what are the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic** on the work of human rights advocates?

In the beginning, here in the state of Pará, we had several problems. In 2020, when the pandemic started, all harbours have been closed, mainly due to the many connections with the states of Amazonas and Amapá. The border was closed and we spent about six months with contact constraints within this region. We know that Internet connection doesn't help a lot; there are areas where you don't have it at all, neither cell phone signal. This last weekend I was in a region like this, in contact with fishermen who are struggling to receive the insurance for closed fishing season, which Bolsonaro's government is not paying. Unfortunately, media does not inform the public about these situations. **Connectivity became very difficult and also because it is technically challenging.**

One thing that changed the game and helped us was Mr. Edmilson Rodrigues to win Belém's election for mayor, not without a lot of fight, with a lot of resistance, after 16 years of the state capital city hall in the hands of two criminals.

Everything that we had about human rights here in the region is gone: councils, supporting structures for women, for black people. Bolsonaro has invested a lot for the victory of his candidate of choice, but we managed to get this city hall back. It has been a very important human rights achievement in our agenda that gave us a breath because, during the first year of the pandemic, there have been a lot of disagreement: city hall wanted to do one thing, the government wanted another. The population, the movements, the churches articulated and performed lots of demonstrations on the streets to have a government by the people and for the people. This was very important for us in 2021 to have another scenario in the fights and resistance, to safeguard the return of the movements to debate the issue of human rights. A Human Rights Commission has been created, the committees have been articulated, the public budget's been reorganized with popular participation. **So, a brand new reality.**

## **Would you have suggestions for strategies to strengthen networking** and carry out the popular protection of human rights advocates from the **Covid-19 pandemic?**

Strengthening resistance is a strong political strategy. We don't have big organizations here, in this field. We have many movements, church movements, fishermen's organizations, quilombolas, but we don't have large entities with financial support. With this precariousness in institutional strengthening, we can only advance with a network infrastructure. The SDDH managed, in this process, to mobilize resources and this has been extremely important because we are aware of the difficulty of financing, especially in this area.

We used to work at Projeto Educar performing workshops in schools, community centres, holding debates on human rights, highlighting the importance of reporting violations. We had many massacres in Belém. The neighbourhood where we are located has been strongly marked by two massacres. **Drug trafficking has spread a lot.**

So, the great challenge for us is to have this debate, that's why we are in the "Conselho de Segurança Pública" (Public Safety & Security Council), in this resistance, strengthening this Council to have people strengthened in this debate.

Unfortunately, the Council of Human Rights Advocates here in the State of Pará is not experiencing a good time. We have three important tools: **the Public Safety & Security Council, the Council of Advocates and the Ombudsman of the Public Safety & Security System and the Public Defender's Office** (which members are always recommended by us, knowers of this matter) and we always bet on this strengthening. Because of the pandemic, these councils have met online.

Another strategy is the Women's Council and the Health Council. With the city hall back to us, the Health Council will perform its election process, after several years in the hands of people who did not really discuss a policy to defend the "Sistema Único de Saúde" (Unified Health System -SUS) and with a pandemic context this is extremely important to us. In 2020, when the so-called "Unidade de Pronto Atendimento" (Basic Health Unit - UPA) were taken by the new public administration, they were closed. There were only two open in the metropolitan area of Belém. For the 17 municipalities of the Marajó Island, the regional hospital is 36 hours away. The precariousness of health makes it very difficult in our region and it is important to have a state capital that provides some support. The victory of the PSOL/PT parties coalition for the city hall has been very important and, even though the state government was ruled by the PMDB, by son of Mr. Jader Barbalho (a very traditional and powerful politic), they all ended up establishing an alliance during the Covid-19 pandemic period to take care of everything.

The strengthening of the councils, the recovery of this strategy, it is all important so that we can follow-up and monitor public policies, to have access to this debate, to have access to funding. During this period we held the conference on health and the conference on women and I had the opportunity to visit several municipalities and discuss this issue with the city halls. In 2020 alone, we had 63 femicides in the state of Pará. We held debates with the women, virtual meetings and with Judiciary representatives; campaigns against femicide in seven regions of the state, so that women do not feel alone in this fight.

In this Covid-19 process we have reinvented ourselves, especially in relation to communication. With the Project "Sementes de Proteção" (Seeds for Protection) for the advocates, which we follow up from here in the region mirroring the national level, we have held media workshops, training groups. For us from human rights, there was that thing of the in-person vibration, so all our training courses had to be reinvented. It has been a great learning experience and this field still needs to be continuously developed. **Dealing with digital security due to criminalization, expanding the borders towards this field, but safely.** We have the case of Mr. Vargas, attorney for the victims of Pau D'Arco, who, due to some recordings, is in prison (now under house arrest), under prosecution, being accused as the main perpetrator. The defending attorney himself being criminalized. As with many others. This saddens us, but we continue in this alliance for defending our territory and, above all, life. **"To resist is the first step". It's our motto here.**



photo: Michelle Guimarães

# Fernando Pigatto

## Fórum Nacional de Defesa do Direito Humano à Saúde



**I started participating in social movements, in the fight for rights, in the 1980s, in the “Comunidades Eclesiais de Base” (Basic Ecclesiastical Communities - CEBs), with christian youth groups and with “Pastoral da Juventude” (Pastoral for the Youth).**

In the student movement, I've been president of the “União Municipal dos Estudantes Rosarienses” (Rosariense Municipal Association of Students) and of the general coordination of the DCE (Central Directory of Students) in Santa Maria. In 2008, in the municipality of Rosário do Sul (RS), I started to participate in the communitarian movement, chairing the “Associação de Moradores” (Residents Association); I've been general secretary for the “União Geral de Vilas e Bairros” (General Association of Boroughs); I joined the state entity and the “Confederação Nacional de Associações de Moradores” (National Confederation of Residents Associations - Conam). Today I am the president for the “Federação Gaúcha das Uniões de Associações de Moradores e Entidades Comunitárias” (Gaucho Federation of Associations of Residents and Communitarian Entities - Fegamec); I am the health director for Conam, and I represent it, since 2015, in the “Conselho Nacional de Saúde” (National Health Council - CNS), where I was elected president

in 2018 and re-elected in 2021. I also participate in the “Fórum Nacional de Defesa do Direito Humano à Saúde” (National Forum for the defence of the Human Right to Health), which brings together organizations and social movements within this fight.



# How do you assess **the struggle of resistance and the confrontation of human rights violations** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

The pandemic only aggravated the elimination of rights. We had a coup d'état in 2016. A disruption designed to the liberals to return into power. They did not accept the result of the 2014 elections and created a situation for the coup against President Dilma Rousseff. What they didn't take into account was that it would serve as a lever for an extreme right-wing government in the country.

Liberal governments remove rights. It is not only about an economic policy that defends the private over the public, the human rights are attacked. When a person has no housing and the social programs lose coverage, people's difficulties increase. Health is a human right that is also attacked when privatization is fostered, and underfunding of the Unified Health System - SUS, they've approved the Constitutional Amendment 95/2016. This has a direct consequence on the health system, on the social assistance. Reforms such as the Social Security Reform and the Labour Reform eliminated many rights.

The pandemic has arrived, and we are living under the rule of an extreme right-winged government, that is denialist, anti-science, and that features a project of death. It is not by chance that it invests, for example, in the so-called herd immunity strategy, knowing already the consequences.

**It is because they know that those who are going to die are people among the black population,**

**from the poor boroughs, the elderly, people with co-morbidities, women, and more, who for them are disposable; for them they are not people, they are costs, they are numbers.**

The CNS made a report, in partnership with the "Conselho Nacional de Direitos Humanos" (National Human Rights Council - CNDH), realized by the "Articulação para o Monitoramento dos Direitos Humanos no Brasil" and the "Sociedade Maranhense de Direitos Humanos" (Articulation for the Monitoring of Human Rights in Brazil - AMDH and the Maranhense Society of Human Rights - SMDH), which is guiding resource for civil society organizations, counsellors and health counsellors, based on an assessment conducted by researchers on the performance and omission of the federal government during the pandemic. The CNS worked with the "Comissão Parlamentar de Inquérito" (Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry - CPI) for the Pandemic in the Federal Senate and carried out actions with the OAS, the UN and some occurrences in the National Congress, with the so-called Parliamentary Front created after the CPI and with the Human Rights Commissions, and that work in the health sector.

The complaint report document was delivered to the Attorney General of the Republic and the Attorney General's Office for Citizens' Rights. This document is having an important repercussion nationally and internationally in the field of human rights.

# How do you assess the struggles **to carry out the promotion and achievement of human rights** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

We had several fighting fronts to prevent the blow from happening and to offer resistance. You can mention the Social Forums of the Resistances that we continue to hold. We didn't stop fighting because what knew that was coming, but because we didn't imagine that we would have a far-right government ruling or a pandemic happening. When the pandemic arrives, everything gets worse: setbacks, loss of rights, threats to democracy and to life, but we kept fighting.

The movements with the coup d'état continued to be increasingly explicit and violent, as seen in the last September 7th, when people called for the closing of the Federal Supreme Court, the National Congress, and the return of the so-called AI-5. Now there is an attempt to soften this discourse and this daily practice of a government that promotes torturers and the period of democratic exception that we live in our country in the past; a government that is a reference to the extreme far-right in the world. So, our resistance had to keep facing the pandemic and the pandemonium, as Professor Nicolelis usually says.



The CNS has positioned itself as one of the trenches. **We from social, popular and community movements have always been like trenches, but we have had challenges:** our struggle is made on the streets, in contact with people in the communities, in the mobilizations, marches, demonstrations, squatting. We couldn't do none of this during the pandemic. We had to come to the virtual world where the people who suffer the most are the ones who also access the least. We need to pierce the bubble, dig spaces, even in traditional media, where we never had space. We gave interviews, sent videos, which had repercussions to face the pandemic and defend life that, at the same time, showed the strength of Brazilian social control that was being this trench of resistance... ..and fighting not only facing the pandemic, but the project that is putting our people and our country at risk.

The CNS was cited as a source for news more than 2,000 times in 2021. This has repercussions on state and municipal jurisdictions and to other bodies for social control that were attacked and have a reference to continue carrying out the resistance, the fight. Some have been completely destroyed, such as the "Conselho de Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional" (Food and Nutrition Security Council - Consea) which has been damaged nationally, but continues to perform in the states combating hunger and extreme poverty, that have returned with full capacity.

We act not only defending the vaccine, but over the reality of people, raising awareness, through solidarity campaigns, such as the one called **"vacina no braço, comida no prato" (vaccine shot in the arm, food on the table).**

Health is not just about assistance, it is the absence of diseases, it is the right of access to land, housing, education, culture. The SUS is in the water we drink, the food we eat and the air we breathe, because we have the health vigilances. The SUS is life itself and that is why we make it a space for guaranteeing rights, but also for resistance, and during the pandemic, it has been recognized once again as a heritage of the Brazilian people and a benchmark to the world.

We need to strongly interfere in the electoral process that will happen in 2022, to include officially in government programs the promises made, but also to evaluate the pathways, as it is very easy to sign a letter of commitment and then to throw it away. We need to make sure that the guarantees of rights can be in the debates and projects to be presented in the country and in the states, because Brazil will have general elections.

We need to work with training a lot. We have several projects in the CNS and very important results in this area. We need, more and more, to work in the front-end, in the communities, and to start doing it again (those who stopped). To intensify the relationship with the people; to listen rather than talking; to feel what people are feeling. It is welcoming, being together, to ensure that we are going to transform our country into a better one, the world into a better one. We are observing the issue about the vaccines, a very large inequality. The campaign "vacina no braço, comida no prato" (vaccine shot in the arm, food on the table) has to be comprehensive, assuring all people.

They remove money from the budget to make SUS precarious and to people start to defend its privatization. It's like the bided roads and highways: they let the problems to happen, and the drivers just ask for the private tolls. But in the health sector, the "problems" are people's lives taken from us. Because of it tall, we need to defend the SUS as a public, quality, universal, integral, equitable system that increasingly may have more resources to better serve people, that shall be more defended and recognized than it is today.

## In your opinion, **what are the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic** on the work of human rights advocates?

When talking about human rights, it usually comes to mind those who defend the incarcerated population, the LGBTIQA+ community, the black, quilombola, riverside and homeless populations, in other words, the populations that are most attacked and that even suffered the effects of the pandemic because it does not happen in the same way for all people. Today we have attacks on those who work with communication, in social control. **We had a presidential decree in early 2019 (Federal Decree no. 9.759/2019) that extinguished hundreds of associate bodies across our country, which worked to guarantee rights.** We have never had so many attacks on the environment and persecution of people who work in this field. Those who fight for land and housing are also persecuted. The resistance must be for us not to lose more rights and lives. We must fight to reverse all this.

# Would you have suggestions for strategies to strengthen networking and carry out the popular protection of human rights advocates from the Covid-19 pandemic?

We need to act more and more in networks, to strengthen the networks. As soon as the Federal Decree no. 9.759/2019, we took a stand. They said: **“the CNS was not affected, they did not extinguish the Council, they did not change the composition”**. But we feel affected because other Councils are also Councils of rights and, therefore, we even sought to get closer to the “Conselho Nacional dos Direitos Humanos” (National Council for Human Rights - CNDH), “Conselho Nacional de Assistência Social” (National Council for Social Assistance - CNAS), “Conselho Nacional dos Direitos das Crianças e dos Adolescentes” (Council of the Rights of Children and Adolescents - Conanda), and others, we became more united. We are part of the CNDH's Special Commission that deals with social participation and we had the initiative of the international complaint document about what happened in Brazil during the pandemic (above mentioned). We need to keep thinking strategies. The performance of the Councils in a network is one of them and, in addition, the strengthening of fronts: “Brasil Popular”, “Povo Sem Medo”, “Frente pela Vida” (Popular Brazil, People Without Fear, Front for Life, formed during the pandemic).

We need to look ahead. “Amanhã vai ser outro dia” (Tomorrow will be another day) – theme of the “17ª Conferência Nacional de Saúde” (17th National Health Conference) – and we are building this future every day, together with the hoping and expectations of Paulo Freire. That's what we believe in and that's why we keep fighting, with watery eyes. We will turn this sad page of history, as we did in the past, and we will fight for it never to happen again. That's why we believe in solid built relationships, for example, with Abong, MNDH, and the various organizations that work in the Project “Sementes”, which we are proud to have, whether through CONAM, through CNS, or as a citizen. I am very happy to have this sharing of common fights and common dreams keeping us alive.

I say thanks, remain at your disposal and I believe in the motto of the World Social Forum: **Another world is possible. I still believe that no one shall let anyone down. I continue to believe in various themes, poems, songs that keep inspiring us every day.** And this is how we shall keep going. A strong “SUS hug”. Let's proceed. **We shall win!**



# Getúlio Vargas Junior

## Confederação Nacional das Associações de Moradores (Conam)



**I'm Getúlio Vargas Junior, president of the "Confederação Nacional das Associações de Moradores" (National Confederation of Residents' Associations (Conam)).**

I have been active in the community movement since the 2000s. I was director of the "União das Associações de Moradores de Porto Alegre" (Union of Residents' Associations of Porto Alegre - Uampa) for several administrations and also of the "Federação Gaúcha das Associações de Moradores e Entidades Comunitárias" (Gaucho Federation of Residents' Associations and Community Entities). I have participated in Conam as a counsellor since 2005 and as president since 2017. Currently representing Conam at the National Health Council (CNS),

I am the deputy coordinator of the CNS Financing and Budget Commission and, since 2020, I have assumed an alternate chair at the National Human Rights Council (CNDH), where I coordinate the "Comissões do Direito à Cidade" (City Law Commissions, which is why I joined the CNDH) and the "Alimentação Adequada" (Adequate Food" and co-coordinating the "Comissão de Direitos Humanos e Pandemia" (Human Rights and Pandemic Commission), a commission that does not receive demands, but is doing all the study of human rights violations linked to the fight against the pandemic.

This representation position in the CNDH is not exclusive to Conam. It was a block built for all urban entities passing through NGOs, the National Forum for Urban Reform (of which I am

part of the coordination) and the Zero Eviction Campaign, of which I am part of the facilitating group. In recent years, my life has been dedicated to representing Conam and having been deeply involved on these issues about the right to housing, the fight against eviction and the right to the city. The themes about health and about the right to the city have been the focus of Conam in this last period and, as the president of the entity, I cannot fail to follow these themes that are so important to society and that are reflected in about 20 thousand residents associations operating in the country, organized by Conam and by the affiliated state and municipal federations.



# How do you assess **the struggle of resistance and the confrontation of human rights violations** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

The National Council of Human Rights (CNDH) made two reports, one for the Organization of American States (OAS), another for the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry (CPI) for the Pandemic in the Federal Senate, recording all human rights violations that were diagnosed in the process. At the first meeting with the OAS, two facts shocked the rapporteurs. First, the threats of eviction (and many have been consolidated) – if on the one hand they said “stay at home”, on the other hand we had evictions taking place, one of the most severe forms of violence. The second was that the 2021 budget was lower than the 2020 budget (which was already not enough) by forty billion Reais. This process reflects in the issue of hunger, health and it is cross-cutting to all public policies.

The Constitutional Amendment 95/2016, which was not flexibilized even during the pandemic, ended up prohibiting minimally necessary public expenditures to face the pandemic. Every year, the “Frente Direitos Valem Mais” (Fight Front Frente Direitos Valem Mais) produces technical notes demanding the minimum amounts necessary to guarantee the financing of the group of social policies and revealed that the year 2020 resource for health was R\$ 40 billion (BRL), it was the same in 2021; for social assistance, there was a deficit of R\$ 80 billion (BRL); for food security we need another R\$ 12 billion (BRL).

**When looking at any areas of social policy, there is kind of a dehydration.** When there is no expenditure in social policies, it punishes the assurance of the human rights, making it impossible for people to have the minimum necessary in those essential areas.

There has been criminalization, violence. The president of the National Health Council (CNS), for example, received attacks on himself and on his family for each controversial position he took. Retaliation suffered for developing social control. Attorneys and leaders who reported the evictions and relocations were coerced by the police, like “Dito” was, one of the coordinators of the Zero Eviction Campaign, who has been summoned to testify because he was playing his role as a popular attorney. And this occurs at a time when the “Arguição de Descumprimento de Preceito Fundamental” (action against the violation of a constitutional fundamental right - ADPF) in the Federal Supreme Court (STF) was guiding the suspension of evictions during the pandemic. In this context of resistance and struggle, those who fought the most were attacked the most. Only those who are fathers, mothers, blacks, know how to get in, but don't know how to get out of a police station. A lot of resistance on the one hand, but indignation on the other. **Criminalization is historic for human rights advocates.**

# How do you assess the fights **to carry out the promotion and achievement of human rights** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

In 2020, we noticed many solidarity networks and the emergency aid of R\$ 600 reais (BRL), in the first months, held back some pressure regarding hunger in the communities. But 2021 was the hardest period, with the major number of deaths; economic activity could not take place due to low immunization, people could not work; the emergency aid has drastically reduced. It was a year of hunger, great difficulty, 100 thousand people died in an interval of 30/60 days. Even human rights fighters have been victims, we are

not islands. With the overload of the Unified Health System (SUS), those who had chronic diseases, co-morbidities, had the treatment postponed. So, many fighters, leaders, left not exactly for the pandemic, but for other causes.

**Also, lives could have been saved.** The pandemic did not create a crisis in Brazil, it did not create a lack of funding, violations against human rights defenders, but it deepened this type of violence even more. When a person dies, when a family

suffers from famine, it knocks on the door of the community leadership. There is disillusionment with politics in general, so a process of mobilization, of raising awareness, is needed. The division has deepened: a field that has hope, a field that is disillusioned; this is everywhere, including on the poor boroughs.

**There is a feeling of discouragement at the grassroots, especially where there is no grassroots previous work.**

The pandemic has distanced us: **as there have been a lot of solidarity, there have been fewer actions in the training and educational sense; varied greatly from territory to territory.** Many organizations reorganized and, on the other hand, persecution and repression by the state increased and, in some states, the police and the militia are the same perpetrator. Regardless of the state and municipal government, when there is no policy for social assistance, alternatives for young people, the problems are just intertwined.

## In your opinion, **what are the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic** on the work of human rights advocates?

Depending on the area, some defenders were more exposed than others. The Zero Eviction Campaign is an example. Launched in 2020, it articulated a national initiative, inspired by an international alliance, with the presence of several national movements fighting for housing, networks such as the National Forum for Urban Reform, BrCidades and several NGOs with more localized action. It has been possible to give a national mark to an action that was local, also articulating with the family farmers movements. Today there are spaces in the CNDH to include data from the Zero Eviction Campaign – removals, violations, threats. There are 80 displacements and evictions that were avoided and 11,000 families that were able to find a place to live thanks to the Campaign and their inclusion in Councils, such as the CNDH. The pandemic served for these fighters to organize themselves around a single flag. It helped to constitute a battleground for the next struggles and resistances.

On the other hand, the pandemic allowed other forms of violence to be seen, **such as virtual and face-to-face attacks** on health workers and the advocacy for the Zero Eviction Campaign.

In the Senate, congresspersons landowners campaigned against avoiding evictions by selling false discourses. Real estate speculation promotes a strong attack on those who fight for the right to housing; everything becomes a product and economic interests become more important than social rights. They try all the ways to turn rights into mercancy: they tried to change articles 182 and 183 of the “Estatuto da Cidade” (City Statute) so that the ownership over land becomes absolute again. **If they believe in the city as a good for trade, we believe that city is life.**

With the pandemic, many people cancelled the private health insurance plan and 70% of the Brazilian population has only the so-called SUS as a health insurance program. So, if there was a census (which has also been cancelled), these SUS data would certainly jump from 70 to 80. The Zero Eviction Campaign is an example of the collective above the self, for the local with the national above individual ego. There is a policy for certain people cleaning in the poor boroughs, with the help of the militias, there is a true extermination. There are leaders who cannot talk about violence so as not to expose themselves. The only solution to counteract this violence is to increase the social coverage: create job opportunities, prevent people from adhering to drug trafficking, offer social policies.



## **Would you have suggestions for strategies to strengthen networking and carry out the popular protection of human rights advocates from the Covid-19 pandemic?**

Conam is a network, a national confederation, which joins state confederations, municipal confederations and residents' associations that are at the forefront. This is a network, it is reflected in health; the Zero Eviction Campaign is being reflected in networks. To illustrate, in 2021, the two CNDH Commissions that received the most number of complaints were the Land Commission and the Commission on the Right to the City, the majority of which evictions reports. So the main topic of the CNDH in 2021 were the evictions, as this field was prepared to trigger complaint reports.

The weakening of social policies overloaded the CNS and the CNDH. So, **it is important to strengthen social movements, to constitute a forum, a plenary session of human rights advocates.** We even have the mosaic of organizations very close to the CNDH because of the Council elections, but the Council is too small

to embrace too many organizations. As well as having other initiatives such as the Zero Eviction, as it brings together a diversity that goes beyond the National Forum for Urban Reform. Just as the fight for the human rights is more than the DhESCA Platform or the MNDH. **The two have to be added together, because both have strong, thriving networks, each one with its own features.**

Perhaps a network that finds a motto, that unifies people for human rights, manages to create a strong network that articulates human rights movements, each one within its fight, with agendas that unify, without an owner, without suppressing its identity, but focusing on what unifies. Our challenge is to transform complaint reports into projections, into documents, into public policies, into recommendations, using all this formula, all this strength, to change reality, to focus on transforming it.

# Gianfranco Graziolla

## Pastoral Carcerária Nacional



**I'm Father Gianfranco Graziolla,  
Consolata Missionary.**

My work with human rights dates back to the late 1980s in Portugal, but it became concrete and strengthened practically in the 2000s, when I arrived in Brazil, in 2001, in Roraima, working with the indigenous peoples and later with the Social Pastorals, to which I was coordinator, and to the "Centro de Migrações e Direitos Humanos" (Center for Migration and Human Rights – CMDH) of the catholic church diocese, linked to the "Movimento Nacional de Direitos Humanos" (National Human Rights Movement). I participated in national meetings and also spoke and wrote on this topic.

Since the beginning of 2015, I have been in the national coordination of the "Pastoral Carcerária" (Prison Pastoral). Torture, slavery, issues that have to do with the rights of human beings and the action in this field are part of it, along with the issue about citizenship. Human rights for me is a matter of citizenship, defence of the essence of the human being.



## How do you assess **the resistance effort and the confrontation of human rights violations** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

The context is quite challenging when we talk about human rights and Prison Pastoral, and more so in the context of the pandemic because, before, we had serious difficulties with the related human rights. Many think that it is only in the current government, but things come from much before and we fought against it, we said that this would go back to a dictatorship, a kind of “dictocracy” (dictatorship of democracy) that, no matter which government is ruling, violates human rights, conventions against torture, the rights of the common home, of integral ecology.

**We are not entitled to quality health to the community be able to face this pandemic.**

Both with the denialism, that is structural, with a situation of structural torture when people are

denied health or when improper proposals are made, as the president of the republic did with the use of hydroxychloroquine. Many deaths that we have had are probably due to this, which is a violation of the right to choose, the right to life. And it is more serious when not only the president of the republic, but all the powers of the state violated the people’s rights to have quality health care.

Science has told us that if we want to have life, we have to take steps in certain directions: the environment, the issue of waste, water treatment, etc. The pandemic has exacerbated the violations of the human rights of indigenous peoples.

## How do you assess the struggles **to carry out the promotion and achievement of human rights** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

The fights are unique. Frei Betto, when he was in Lula’s government, said: “we are in the government, but we are far from being in power”. And we saw that when the “Fome Zero” was totally derailed by political and alliance issues. We deluded ourselves that a leftist government could take a turn and we were not attentive to the political situation at the moment, especially when it came to President Lula’s second term.

One of the things that we need to do today is an analysis of the situation and to seek, together with associations, movements, organizations, something that can help to defend citizenship and human rights themselves, because today we have fundamentalisms, polarizations.

**As a society, we have to reorganize and make room for new leaders, whether at the level of organizations or the Catholic Church itself.** We are still with the mindset of the 1970s, operating with nostalgia and today we have a culture of extreme changes. Human rights demand from us a certain update and reflection, welcoming what is new in your youth, even though youth is wrongly deemed as an obstacle. Also the Laudato Si movement that has a man [Pope Francis] who is turning 85 and is saying: don’t settle down, don’t sit on the couch, move!

# In your opinion, **what are the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic** on the work of human rights advocates?

We shall not think that the pandemic has been hitting lightly prison facilities, although, at the beginning, it's been said that these facilities would be closed and isolated for the disease not to enter. It's been a delusion because prisons are sources of diseases, and disease is torture, violation of human rights. There are people committing healthy and leaving with mental disorders, there are addicts, there are several diseases that one can acquire and suffer from them for life. The pandemic came to make more acute what was already in place. And a thing that has always worried us is the lack of information, of transparency of this system. That feature considered its main flaw is a perfect strategy to keep people imprisoned and excluded from society and to continue to feed the chain of crime. We also had a certain number of dead among the prisoners, as well as employees for the prison facilities, because of Covid-19.

**For the advocates, the pandemic has cornered us. Some of them got Covid-19, some died and all this affected us a lot.**

Now, I think we should start looking at human rights not too much as something extraordinary, but as something ordinary, the praxis, the engine that feeds our co-responsibility in all fields: social, political, the common good and it must help us also to focus much more on the options to conduct our nation, which is continental, and our own states.

Covid-19 has made us aware that neither human rights nor realities will ever be the same again. Covid came to tell us: **try to trail new pathways to be able to foresee Another Possible World**, the one that we theoretically or poetically just imagine in our minds. This is achieved not with recipes, but with the daily search, the journey of so many people. Sadly, many of our dear ones, meaningful people, are gone and this is a message for us that human rights is not just a theory. If we have the human rights, we experience them. On the contrary, we have become each other's enemies: the others are my adversaries, and not different subjects that enrich me, that make me understand life from another point of view.

## **Would you have suggestions for strategies to strengthen networking** and carry out the popular protection of human rights advocates from the **Covid-19 pandemic?**

I participated in the training "A Vida por Um Fio", promoted by the "Rede Eclesial Pan-Amazônica" (Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network - REPAM), along with other pastorals. This is proving to be important because the pandemic made us to pay more attention to the territory in which we live, to what is regional, to the details. We have been riding the national a lot (and the national is not irrelevant). This made us to create this support network that has a concrete form, it is made of human rights advocates and also has the support

that is given today by these networks we are using, without forgetting the importance of the in-person meeting with the thing of the human warmth that is unique. These social media came to help us building networks, to build on us the capacity for attention and action in defence of human rights and their advocates. Because, sometimes, we are not aware about the risk we are under, especially when we are experiencing the concrete realities, in the daily routine.



**The network is built on an attentive listening to all the participants, from the several organizations, relying on what is essential.**

To let go the feuds that seem to be important, but are not.

What is fundamental is the right of the peoples to self-determination, the issue on minorities, on land, on reforms. We have to go hard on this and the more we unite and intertwine building networks, making pressure and going deeper, it makes us grow, it gives us more strength. Indigenous peoples teach us this: each people has its own holistic view of reality and changes, but when they have to face what they deem to be the enemy, the jaguar, they go together. One of them can fall, but a united group does not bend. Networks are essential for strengthening those at the forefront and protecting them from attacks by

the human rights enemies. These are violent, ferocious attacks and, if you don't have a good rear guard, they can lead you to defeat and to avoidable deaths.

Pope Francis tells us that we are experiencing a global, ecological, political, and humanitarian crisis and the great challenge is not to let ourselves be discouraged, not to let ourselves be beaten, but to try to find ways out. From this moment of crisis, not finding easy and immediate ways, a new sprout can blossom making us more solidarity as humanity, more human in all its rights, easygoing, as the indigenous peoples say, of an Earth free of evil where the rights of all and of the common home are respected.

# Givânia Silva

Coordenação Nacional de  
Articulação de Quilombos (Conaq)



I'm Givânia Silva, a quilombola individual from Conceição das Crioulas.

I belong to the "Coordenação Nacional de Articulação Quilombola" (National Coordination of Quilombola Articulation - Conaq) since its very beginning. I am a teacher, researcher, currently in the quilombo classroom and also working with quilombola communities in Brazil, now focusing a little more on gender and education issues.



## How do you assess **the resistance effort and the confrontation of human rights violations** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

First of all, we need to have a discussion about human rights in Brazil. We have a long pathway defending human rights, but, at some point, it seems that we make a kind of selection of who are the humans entitled to this defence. **In the case of quilombola communities, we were on our own for a long time, given that only the Federal Constitution of 1988 recognized us as right-holders, allowing us to claim for them.** Effectively, we were not part of this universe of human rights advocacy, even knowing that self-advocacy has always been done, since when we were captured on the African continent, until today.

In tense moments, like the pandemic, usually people in vulnerable situations are always the ones who are already the most vulnerable. In our case, the pandemic quickly entered the communities, we did not have a government

policy, not even a record of those who got infected by the virus, and of those who lost their lives. This was all done by the quilombola movement itself, with the support of other human rights organizations in this network that Conaq has been working on.

In the pandemic, we had much more support from civil society organizations, for the black people or not, than from the State as the responsible for the public policy. But it must be said that the violation of human rights in quilombola communities does not begins or ends with the pandemic. The framework was already set and the pandemic just deepened and highlighted even more these violations that are already structured based on racism and have been there for many centuries.

## How do you assess the fights **to carry out the promotion and achievement of human rights** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

**Through the fight. Whoever survived, survived by themselves.** Until today, the measures deemed as necessary for the prevention of Covid-19 have been denied by the government, so the movements had to reinvent themselves and make public policies: to think about the communities that had a production of some good and did not have buyers anymore; about the people lacking of food; about those who were far away and coming to the city would be a real possibility to get in contact with the pandemic and how to produce face masks and hand sanitizer and make them to arrive; to monitor in order to know how many got infected and how many died; then file a lawsuit in the Federal Supreme Court, to win that lawsuit and start monitoring the vaccination of the quilombola population.

**We created a network of quilombola researchers who reached more than 400 communities in Brazil, reaching more than 300 municipalities, interviewing and dialoguing with almost 200 thousand people in each of the rounds** that the network carried out to understand how this vaccine arrived, since we do not have a control policy, nor a national policy coordination and this is reflected in the states and municipalities.

Social movements had to create their own survival strategies in the pandemic because, from the governments, they had nothing. Social movements are the ones concerned with guaranteeing human rights. **There is no government, no legal system.**

**As in the saying: we are hunting in the forest without a dog.** The social movements have been the anchor for this debate, for this confrontation – the traditional people and other forms of settlement of quilombola, that raised from the pandemic. For example, the “Coalizão Negra por Direitos” (Black Coalition for Rights), a grouping of black civil society organizations, was already installed when the pandemic hit, but it took on a bigger dimension and assumed a structuring agenda both nationally and internationally: from campaigning for food, masks and hand sanitizer, to the reports and the confrontations.

It is the social movements that, through their agendas, have tried to minimize the effects of the pandemic, although at some point our capacity is not enough, how to make the vaccine to have arrived earlier in Brazil and perhaps prevent half of the people from having lost their lives.

**In your opinion, what are the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the work of human rights advocates?**

The pandemic deepened the general problems we already had. But in the case of human rights advocates, things got much more complicated. Not being allowed to move; many institutions closed; things happening only through the Internet (many of our people don't even have electric energy, let alone access to the Internet); the way to make an impact was going somewhere, which could not be done. **When we think about new technologies, we have an idea that everyone is on the same level, but this is not true.** Many quilombola individuals were left without the Covid-19 financial emergency aid because they didn't have electric energy, Internet, or a smartphone app, or they couldn't get the document in the required time. These are the invisibles of society and will continue to be made invisible.

This is an important issue and we need to talk about it making these observations because many of the human rights advocates who are even anonymous, were prevented from their activism because they do not have the means to turn on a camera and have a conversation. The situation worsened and the violence only increased. It's a general picture, considering other axes of violation that we saw that the pandemic helped a lot to increase.

**Would you have suggestions for strategies to strengthen networking and carry out the popular protection of human rights advocates from the Covid-19 pandemic?**

I don't see any other way out for us other than networking. I learned very early, maybe with the “Comunidades Eclesiais de Base” (Basic Ecclesiastical Communities - CEBs), the lesson of the sticks: a stick is easy to brake, but if there are many sticks together it is difficult. What made a difference, what is working, despite the fact that we have not reached the whole – and no one can – was the network performance. There is an increasing need to think out of our boxes, to stop establishing boundaries to the themes. We can all work on the gender agenda. I have insisted on saying that white people have an obligation to act in the fight against racism because it is an evil within society and, therefore, it is everyone's obligation.

In this network action, we not only need to strengthen these ties and give up our individualized boxes, but we also need to think strategically about the indicators that have promoted the greatest number of inequality and I think that no Brazilian national has any doubts about the structure of inequalities in our country based on gender and race. In addition to keep and to expand, we need to understand that a topic like gender, for example, a thousand organizations can develop and there will always be issues for everyone to work on and strengthen this network performance more and more.

I would like to give food for thought about how we are in Brazil, the way the year 2022 is getting close to us and how the issue of human rights needs to be taken seriously and discussed as a society, especially with those who will compete for a seat in Parliament or in the national and state Executive positions. **It is no longer possible for us to think that our struggle in defence of human rights, gender, race and class issues will go ahead if we continue to elect people who are against all these agendas.** So, this was the message I wanted to leave: that this topic should be one of the structuring ones of the debate, of political incidence and of the action of civil society organizations in defence of human rights in which networking is increasingly necessary.

# Heliana Hemetério

## Articulação das Organizações de Mulheres Negras Brasileiras (AMNB)



**I am from Rio de Janeiro, graduated in History, I have a postgraduate degree in gender and race from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ).**

I started my activism in the 1980s, at the “Instituto de Pesquisa de Culturas Negras” (Institute for Research on Black Cultures), with the black movement. Later, I started to work on my activism dedicated on issues of gender and race with the “Fórum de Mulheres Negras do Rio de Janeiro” (Forum of Black Women in Rio de Janeiro). I participated in the first “Encontro Nacional de Mulheres Negras” (National Meeting of Black Women), in 1988; the state meeting, also in Rio de Janeiro and I learned what racism really is. I grew up in a black (and intellectual) family, daughter and granddaughter of teachers, great-granddaughter of the first black teacher in Rio de Janeiro to teach at the military school of the “Instituto de Educação D. Pedro II”, Mr. Hemetério dos Santos, abolitionist; there is a doctoral thesis and a master’s dissertation about him. I started to participate in the movement because the racist issue was already part of my life. The fact that you are a gay woman brings me closer to the

LGBT movement, with other black gay women, and the feminist movement, in the 1990s. In 1996 I attended the first national gay woman seminar; in 1999 I was invited to coordinate a project at the “Coletivo de Lésbicas do Rio de Janeiro” (Gay Woman Collective of Rio de Janeiro - COLERJ). Today, my activism is focused on gender, race and sexuality issues. I have all my activism among black women, with priority for black gay women, also bringing the debate of gender issues to bisexual women and black travesties.



# How do you assess **the resistance effort and the confrontation of human rights violations** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

With a lot of resistance!

The pandemic's most affected population the black one, specifically black women. **And among black women, of course, there are bisexuals, lesbians and trans, who are never considered.**

The humanitarian aid campaign for unemployed women in the poor boroughs did not, at any time, consider gender identities and sexual orientations. Only unemployed black women, with children were mentioned, but it was not mentioned that among those black women there

were gay women who are mothers, grandparents, heads of families, responsible for children, nephews... Trans women, then, were ignored, abandoned. All the campaigns to help them, who were unable to carry out their work as sex workers, were carried out by trans women themselves or by LGBTIQA+ NGOs. Nobody spoke about prostitutes either, and we who are part of the movement know that they have families and it is their work that keeps up their livelihoods. **It is a society that behaves all the time in a heteronormative way.**

# How do you assess the fights **to carry out the promotion and achievement of human rights** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

**I wanted to be very optimistic, but I can't.** We are trying to make everyone see the importance of human rights. But who is everyone? It has always been very difficult for the population to understand this work of promoting human rights because of the absurd catchphrase that "human rights are rights for criminals". We need to change the discourse. When I talk about human rights in spaces where people don't understand, I say they're not for criminals: **it's about food, health, sanitation, healthy sex life, etc.**

Promoting and guaranteeing human rights is increasingly difficult. Today we see indigenous houses and family farming areas being attacked by arsonists. A complaint is filed, but nothing is addressed, no one is arrested, no one is punished and we remain helpless. I still cannot see the assurance of human rights. I can see our struggle, which we do not abandon.

Human rights policies have no equality. On the racial issue, we have genocide in our agenda, but how to open the agenda to the black population, in its various aspects? We suffer from a huge indifference towards people who suffer from ableism. Among women, there are the wheelchair users, suffering from vision problems, and their difficulties are not considered.

**So, can you imagine what a poor black woman, riding a wheelchair, blind, using crutches or with mental disabilities passes through?**

A black woman, like me, thinks about the racial issue, about orientation, about gender. A white feminist will advocate sexual and reproductive rights, the liberalization of abortion (which is a concern of all of us) as a matter of law. And I'm going to talk about the death of poor women from abortion as a reproductive justice issue that is a concept created by black women: it is not enough to have the right to reproduce, I have to be able to reproduce, with the financial conditions to give an appropriate life to my child.

Femicide has decreased among white women and increased among black women, because of racism. And I'm talking about murdered gay women, domestic violence against them, about the corrective rape that doesn't appear to happen among white women, but among black women. Transfemicide is not included in the femicide statistics and this can be considered transphobia by the feminist and women's movement.

We also need to think that the importance of rights is **not taken into account by either the right or the left.**

# In your opinion, **what are the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic** on the work of human rights advocates?

The feeling of powerlessness that we, advocates, have been experiencing for some time on account of the government has been deepened by the pandemic. I am on the “Junta Diretiva da Organização para a Alimentação e Agricultura” (Board of the Food and Agriculture Organization - FAO) and we have had meetings on Latin American issues, the far-right offensive, the persecution of advocates in El Salvador, missing advocates in Colombia, Chile with a far-right candidate – who luckily lost the election. And Brazil with a strong right-winged discourse, the poor and the poor borough’s population converting to neo-Pentecostal religions, endorsing this discourse, without realizing it.

It’s repeatedly said that racism supports capitalism and we, black women, we hold this society up. **Racism today is the most serious struggle we have.** We, black women are tuned, aware of the fight, and we are not going to fall back, but we also have a number of issues between us. How are we going to approach the neo-Pentecostal fellow-women who are supporting this government without the proper information?

How can I say to a fellow-women from a poor borough that the church offering nursery service to her kids for her to be able to go to work is the same church that offers her a resignation feeling, so that she has no idea about human rights, about the undignified life she lives, without sanitation, school, a primary health unit with the same quality of service offered in the wealthy boroughs?

At this moment of the pandemic, the biggest concern is employment. There are people starving. Here in Curitiba, a man was handing out bovine bones for people to be able to cook some broth and, then, a vile speculator starts selling the bones at R\$10.00/Kg. **The exploitation of poverty, a complete dehumanized society.** Pandemics are cyclical and no one has improved anything, nor will they improve, and that distresses me a lot.



**photo:** Michelle Guimarães



## **Would you have suggestions for strategies to strengthen networking and carry out the popular protection of human rights advocates from the Covid-19 pandemic?**

We need more and more articulation and strengthened relationships between networks. **We work on race and gender and we have to work on social classes.** The movements have to be together in the fights, the agendas have to be intersectional. We, black women, called it triple, fivefold discrimination, when the issue of orientation, of religiosity used to be added. Today it is called intersectionality, which is very important for strengthening an agenda unity. But we need to look at the inside and see how far we can go. It's no use being a wonderful feminist in the fight for abortion, against femicide, if I don't realize my introjected racism and I can't see the black woman and her role in the construction of this feminism and this equality.

Today we have black men and women in academia, white gay women earning their master and doctoral degrees; talking with whom, to whom? **Every academic dissertation and thesis should have a synopsis for popular distribution, so that everyone could have access to it.** And also the renewal of these texts. There are many young women writing excellent dissertations and we keep thinking about those others, the ones the media publicize. I'm talking about new frameworks, with new analyses.

We have to learn to talk to young people, to listen to them. They complain about us and they are partly right.

**Our fight as rights advocates will always continue, but we will not give up.** I am an optimistic person, I believe in the power of women. When this society becomes matriarchal again, we will be able to come at least close to a situation of equality. I don't believe in this patriarchal society: the history of the world is there for us to understand that men fight for power. The understanding of men about life is what will make the big change in the sense of realizing that this behaviour leads them to nothing, except for great moments of fight and death.

I don't consider the possibility of the world rebuilding itself not passing through women's hands. I think that's why all cultures, whether western or eastern, put us in a lower tier and some really want to exterminate us. There will be no possibility of a world with equality if it does not return to the hands of women. **I do not believe in the power of men for peace and equality in the world.**

# **lêda Leal**

## **Movimento Negro Unificado (MNU)**



**I'm lêda Leal, a 56-year-old woman, mother of four girls and grandmother of a girl named Luara. I have been active in the black movement since 1985.**

Before joining the Unified Black Movement (MNU), I acted in the student movement, I was leader of the civic and academic centres in elementary and high school, in organizing our agenda at the time. I have a degree in Pedagogy, Specialist in Teaching Methods and Techniques and also a literacy teacher. The method of Paulo Freire helped me to work in education.

Currently I am a unionist, linked to the "Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores em Educação" (National Confederation of Education Workers) on behalf of the "Sindicato dos Trabalhadores em Educação de Goiás" (Education Workers Union of Goiás - Sintego), where I work as treasurer. I am the communication secretary

of the "Central Única dos Trabalhadores" (CUT) for the state of Goiás and the national coordinator of the "Movimento Negro Unificado" (MNU), an entity that has 44 years of great resistance and fights against racism. At the moment I am in Goiânia and my performance is also within the union, elaborating the fights against racism in all the places where I work, where I live. I am a woman forged in the fight, from the perspective of Luíza Bairros and Lélia Gonzalez.



# How do you assess **the resistance effort and the confrontation of human rights violations** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

**I believe—and I have seen—that human rights violations in Brazil are taking a breath.** We watch and witness someone elected carrying a flag of death. This alerted us to get together, sum up and organize ourselves to live. The country came together because of poverty and hunger, appalled at the possibility of having a person who has an aversion to life and to care for people. **We are all very hurt because of the deaths, the lack of care by the Brazilian State.**

Instead of the responsibility of a person who should take care of our health, education, the country, only disdain emerged. This pandemic has managed to unite us and to make us understand that we need to take care of something that may be alike to what we think: a country free of someone who doesn't cherish life, people, care to protect. The pandemic brought many tragedies, but it also brought us the possibility of unity in action so that we can ensure that our rights are well respected.

## How do you assess the fights **to carry out the promotion and achievement of human rights** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

**We definitely have a giant possibility.** We have a strongly emotional involvement, with the documents we read, the legal milestones we study, what we propose to society. So, this desire to defend ourselves created an alliance against the excesses practised by the State. This increased as we saw our cities, states, the country, the world getting organized for this. This struggle suffered and suffers many attacks from the irresponsible and selfish right-wing, from those who do not want to share, who think that goods are only for a few, that food should not be shared, who turn up their noses when they see the population seeking for shelter under the marquees. We have to cultivate more inside us the will to protect ourselves from genocide promoters spreading around the world.

## In your opinion, **what are the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic** on the work of human rights advocates?

There is something very cool for us who act in defence of life. We alert ourselves that we need to engage more people, bring more people to this place of care for life. And that also gave us the possibility to think about our lives. As much as we take many risks defending the care for people, protection for people, we warn ourselves that our lives are also important. The struggle for the lives of others at the moment when we realize that we have an orchestration against the poorest population, i.e. blacks, women, LGBTIQ+, made us have a sharper sense of justice in order to protect ourselves.

We asked so much for protection for everyone, but there comes a time when we look everywhere and see people dying because of the State's neglect. This impact that befell the advocates is frightening. **The fear of death, specifically.** Death being orchestrated by the State, by this genocidal government. This alerted us about our personal care so that we could work on the possibility of increasing the lenses of vision to understand the importance of each one in their place and to keep ourselves alive, alive, to be able to continue defending lives.

# Would you have suggestions for strategies to strengthen networking and carry out the popular protection of human rights advocates from the Covid-19 pandemic?

The great task of ours is to keep ourselves alive and well. **But we need to know more about the legislation, publicize more the legal frameworks that rule human relationships in this country and other relationships that are not written, strengthen this bond of humanity, of being responsible for each other in the sense of creating unity.** Being able to speak and to be heard in all spaces. We need to cultivate this more within schools, a fundamental space for us to create people with the potential to be public advocates for human rights.

We need to keep exposing the lies of the violators, start demanding punishment, arrest for the violators. Punishment must be one of the milestones: we cannot give up on the mission to impede and to take out of circulation these people who attempt against our lives, against our rights to speak, to come and to go, to exist as we are. **We need to talk, to plan, and to learn more: training courses, training conversation circles on politics,** with identity, with racial belonging, with the possibility of people recognizing themselves racially and also as women, as a fundamental part in building a better country. It is necessary for this to be widely publicized and we need to discuss between us how important we are. To make blossom in each one the responsibility for each other's life.

We need to go for more persuasions and, for that, we need to study, read, elaborate, to have media on our side, to investigate and punish crimes against human beings. But we need to understand this specific human being, to support these human beings in the search for the wisdom of knowing how to live better.

Every time one year passes by, it needs to be very well savoured, to celebrate to be alive and well. We need to ensure that we can go through this **tragedy that devastates our country, the lack of responsibility of the State towards the population and we shall definitely to make a compact:** we will only want to be representatives in the positions of power, people who enjoy living, enjoy life and people. These people who like to take care of each other needs, to be placed in municipal councils, city halls, state governments, the Presidency of the Republic, so that we can guarantee that our country will be managed by people who appreciate us, who admire people, who want to do good, who want to tell and retell the stories of our people's fights.

We need to learn from our elders, from the population that came enslaved, from the cradle of humanity, the black population that was brutally uprooted from the African continent to Brazil and that brought the sense of collectivity. We need to use, in a very correct way, what Zumbi and Dandara left us as a legacy: the possibility of living together in a society where everyone is respected, listened to, with duties and rights, where the perception of each person's life is looked at individually, but collectivized to make sense of our human relationship. Long live to the legacy of Zumbi dos Palmares! Long live to the legacy of Dandara! We need to have this approach of the collective constitution and the look into the eyes of each other, to be happy to say that the others are also part of my life and, therefore, I defend life, nature, demonstrations, diversity, plurality. This is how we need to make sense of our lives on this planet, in Brazil, and here in Goiânia.

I am grateful for the possibility of having given a small contribution to what I do because I like people, I like to live, I like to fight so that people can have more rights. **This is a little bit the meaning of my existence.**

# Islândia Costa

## Associação Vida Brasil



**I am Islândia Costa, a black woman, I am 53 years old and I am with Associação Vida Brasil, a non-governmental organization based in Salvador.**

I am a founding partner, I have been since the beginning, in 1996. I am in the program on accessibility, rights of people with disabilities and public policies. I am also part of the collegiate coordination.

Vida Brasil works in the field of human rights, linked to the issue of children and adolescents, women, people with disabilities, and the black population. Human rights issues end up being well intertwined. I always tend to think that my life history binds me because I believe that people who are in this activism get into it because they identify with their life stories as well. The fact of being a black woman, coming from a poor family, from a poor borough, legitimize my participation and this is part of my life. I usually joke that I am a woman of the streets, of Vida Brasil.

To talk about the Association (Vida Brasil) is also part of my journey. I am an architect and urban planner. It's been 25 years of organization and another 50-something years of my life with these reflections and this activism. Vida Brasil has a great weight (or lightness) in my life and one of its very strong characteristics is that it works through networks and we have always prioritized this participation in networks

because we understand that the collective can change the reality, sum-up knowledge in the pursuit of rights. This is also a struggle of my life because with the collective I felt stronger. Our idea is to also contribute to the strengthening of these collective spaces because it is a feedback to disseminate many practices and knowledge. Working in this direction strengthens us and brings us well-being.



# How do you assess **the resistance effort and the confrontation of human rights violations** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

The period of the pandemic has made more severe the threatens to the defence of human rights, not only in Brazil, but throughout the world; it had a very strong impact on economies, geopolitical relationships, as well as social relationships in general. Mostly, it increased and zoomed inequalities and one of the most serious consequences was that it reached the most vulnerable populations, as always happens historically.

**And, regarding the organizations, it brought the challenge of sustainability.** We always face difficulties, but new challenges have come. There were many violations on the environmental issue perpetrated by public agents; restrictions in the democratic spaces, such as councils; public policies were retaliated; indigenous lands were invaded; police violence; genocide of black youth; femicide; abuses. It looked like a whirlwind, and in the context of a totalitarian government. We've seen people with disabilities to suffer a lot, trapped in their homes; sexual violence against black and disabled girls and women increased because people became more reclusive, poverty increased. It is sometimes a desperate context, as it shows that we are also strong; and this force is felt in the collective action. We had to organize

## How do you assess the struggles **to carry out the promotion and achievement of human rights** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

I assess very positively what happened, because it happened in a difficult context. The fight is constant. Organizations and people are "used" to these confrontations. There is a limitation due to all this, but I believe that there was also a strong cohesion due to the difficulties, a reorganization in a very positive and very beautiful way.

ourselves in new ways because the virtual environment was a new and difficult challenge due to the governmental context. Reduced resources, social isolation created new barriers for us, but we managed to get together and quickly rebuild ourselves around new demands and the emergency for life. Most of the actions were to guarantee food, but from there we started to think about creative strategies to strengthen the bases, for example, to buy the food parcels from family farming organizations and thinking about work cooperatives to manufacture the face masks, one of the possible paths. So, it was beautiful to see this way in which we organically got together, recovered and managed to have resilience.

**It is a painful, but important lesson.**

Saving lives leads to rapid articulation around the virtual means of communication, specially. In a short time, organizations were able to carry out actions in creative, resilient and sustainable ways. Even because of the digital exclusion, not everyone has access, **but those who know its bases have ways to reach it, through word-of-mouth communication.**

## In your opinion, **what are the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic** on the work of human rights advocates?

When we start thinking about these impacts, a lot of negative things come up. There was, in fact, a weakening of the organizations and one thing that marks a lot is the loss of people, of representatives. That was what impacted the most. The isolation of people and the political context as well. **Another thing was the impact on our mental health**, because it is one of the greatest tortures that we can suffer from: the loss of beloved ones, of people from the resistance, a context of violence, of isolation. Imagine all this for a person with a disability, who is blind, who lives alone; for an elderly person; for a black, jobless, head of family mother.

Few people were able to do their jobs from home, which increases exclusion; people were afraid of dying, getting sick or bringing the disease to their families; the fear of unemployment, hunger, violence. **All this affected the mental health of Brazilians, especially the poorest population who couldn't even afford for food, let alone to visit a shrink;** this is very serious and generates more poverty and exclusion.

But there are positive impacts, the population forged in the fights, may lose a battle, but the war continues: there is an ability to reinvent themselves, to resist, even in the midst of this chaos. To resist is to create—as it was the motto of the World Social Forum—and if there is a plot for us to die, we are waking up to live. We have resisted and we will be able to reverse the situation, even with many scars later.

## **Would you have suggestions for strategies to strengthen networking and carry out the popular protection of human rights advocates from the Covid-19 pandemic?**

Vida Brasil is involved in several fronts for the defence of human rights and democracy, even in different positions and articulations: in the vice-presidency of the “Conselho Municipal dos Direitos das Pessoas com Deficiência” (Municipal Council for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities); in the presidency of CONSEA/BA; in the MNDH, in the replacement of the Group “Tortura Nunca Mais” (No More Torture); at the WSF International Council representing the “Coletivo Baiano” (Collective from Bahia). We are not alone and the fact that we are in a collective and that we think about these rights together makes us change the reality. **But we need better working conditions so that we can preserve our physical and mental health.** The pandemic has increased our workload, with many functions, few financial resources and very great physical and mental exhaustion.

We have to continue in the search for financial resources for organizations, as well as for improving the lives of people who are working. Trying to look for ideas, projects, to strengthen the most vulnerable organizations that don't have structure most of the time don't even have a computer, internet or headquarters.

Another issue is improving communication with the new media, which was one of the challenges we faced during the pandemic; we were faced with the issue of digital exclusion as well. **It is necessary to recycle, to take courses. But don't just focus on digital media;** continue to work on this verbal communication, with grassroots organizations and help to seek new media resources because the world is moving in that direction.

**Another important thing is also to strengthen the popular protection of advocates with official bodies such as the Public Prosecutor's Office, the Public Defender's Office.** Strengthen these bodies and they will also intensify their actions because they have proper resources for this. We need to work in cooperation with these networks of official bodies, strengthen these partnerships, even to take some of the burden off the organizations, off their leaderships.

I strongly believe—despite everything being so difficult, which seems to lead us to a pessimistic perspective—that everything can be changed and we are already experiencing this change, even within this context, because we managed to resist and we are still building. The activists, the people who are in the resistance must be congratulated. Many people say that in Brazil there is only corruption, but we are there to prove that there is not only. We have been here since we understood ourselves as people, in the resistance of black women, indigenous people, people with disabilities, of our organizations. **We will continue to be Brazilians and Brazilians in search of a country where we have social justice, which is a mirror of what we think and have in our organizations.** Thank you for this interview that made us stop and reflect, about the coordination in Vida Brasil, about us, about the context, it is all very important. I built up a lot of myself during this 25 year path and I still want to keep building it up.

Let's keep it up. Success for all of us and “ELE NÃO” (ELE NÃO is a catchphrase referring to President Bolsonaro, that means literally NOT HIM)!

# Jonas Valente

## Coalizão Direitos na Rede



**My name is Jonas Valente, I am a journalist, I live in Brasília and I fight in the field of the human right to communication.**

It's an activism that I've been with since the student movement in my time and I'm currently a member of the "Laboratório de Políticas de Comunicação" (Communication Policies Laboratory) at the University of Brasília - UnB/ Lapcom, which is a research group, but at the same time, it has a role in this field, both individually and through the "Coalizão Direitos na Rede" (Coalition Rights in the Network), which is the main network of civil society organizations in the area of communication, especially regarding Internet.

This has been my role in what we call the communication movement, which discusses the human right to communication. A more recent terminology that is being worked on is what we call digital rights, an idea of understanding not only the human right to communication, but other rights related to digital technologies.



# How do you assess **the resistance effort and the confrontation of human rights violations** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

**Regarding communications, we had an intensification of the use of digital technologies, we see this in everything.** That is, with social isolation, people had to use platforms, digital technologies for work activities, for those who started working from home; for education (universities and schools started to offer classes remotely); to interact (people had to “meet” each other through video platforms).

And all this exposed the problem of the great inequalities, not only in terms of number of accesses (**we have today, in Brazil, 20% of the population that does not have any access to the internet**), but also the quality of these accesses, since, more or less, **6 out of 10 Brazilians have access only through their cell phones** and, when a person has only this kind of access, they are hostages to the cell phone companies, which is the model we have in Brazil. So you sign an agreement of a certain amount of Gigabytes, and when it runs out, you're blocked or you're only left with what's called free services.

So, for the communication movement, the pandemic meant an intensification of a series of struggle processes and agendas. **We can also talk about data protection**, since during the pandemic, several initiatives for new apps began to emerge in order to help identifying infected people. It's been a very big debate at both federal and state levels; several state governments have also done this.

And another point that is quite important and has been on the agenda is the discussion about the online matter and, specifically, about disinformation, which is an old problem, but has resurfaced in recent years, boosted by the Internet and the digital platforms. **In the pandemic, we saw the emergence of a specific pandemic of misinformation on the topic of the corona virus**, which is what journalists and international organizations call the “infodemic”. So all these agendas came up very intensely for the communication movement and I got involved in these discussions along with a lot of other colleagues and a lot of other organizations.

# How do you assess the struggles **to carry out the promotion and achievement of human rights** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

The civil society organization, as well as all other activities, also suffered from the pandemic because we lost physical presence and this impacted on the meetings. People had to go to meetings on video platforms, this generated an emergence of lives and often a fatigue due to the holding of many meetings. So this is a first point: how the movements have organized themselves using these technologies. A second point is in the debate with society: the very large use of livestreams also generated an excess (much more in 2021, 2022, than the amount we had in 2020). It became a very strong activity, and social networks became each day more used for this contact with the population that the human rights movement conducts.

**It also had an impact on the incidence, since we lost the possibility of being in person in the National Congress, in parliaments in general, in the government offices and this also started having to be done remotely.** This does not mean that the incidence has decreased: it has changed its profile; we have carried out very strong advocacy campaigns in relation to various Bills on regulating platforms, Internet access, federal government initiatives. And, in the case of Congress, especially under the command of Speaker Mr. Arthur Lyra (in Brazil it is called the president of the House of Representatives), which has been conducting a very problematic and conservative administration; we have the difficulty of not being able to be up close and pressuring the congresspeople.

# In your opinion, **what are the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic** on the work of human rights advocates?

I think it had an impact on the way of doing the fight. **First, in the way we organize ourselves, how we interact, everything being mediated a lot through digital platforms, use of apps, social networks...**

It's something that already existed, but it became almost exclusive with the pandemic, whether interactions through online groups, or interactions in virtual meetings, real time. So, there was this first impact on the organization, there was an impact on the activities, not only the advocates' but also their organizations': the political-organizational activities, training activities, organization in general and many interactions with people who were not necessarily used to these technologies, and they had almost like in a forceps birth, understand how to deal with them.

On the one hand, for some advocates, it has been smooth sailing, especially for those already adapted to it, but not for everyone. **We have human rights advocates with many different profiles, from different generations, different cities, with different access conditions.** If we think about social movements in the countryside, social movements in the poor boroughs, with people who depend on a cell phone access plan, without wired internet, then for these people to participate in a series of meetings, it means they have to predict the amount of data they will use for each one. So you started to have an impact on people's conditions, including their availability for the activists activities.

And, finally, another aspect is how human rights advocates, in the context of their struggle, dialogue, influence, mobilize the target audience, the grassroots for their actions. Everything was also mediated by the platforms, as the ability to make physical contact was restricted.



# Would you have suggestions for strategies to strengthen networking and carry out the popular protection of human rights advocates from the Covid-19 pandemic?

Firstly, for human rights movements, there is this scenario, which we thought 2022 would be a post-pandemic scenario and the avalanche of the Omicron variant showed that it was not yet. So the first thing is: pandemic is not over. And the human rights movement has to continue in the struggles related to the pandemic.

The fight for the right to health, for the right to income—and then there is the whole discussion of which social policies we have for this moment, what is the desired economic and social recovery. So there's a whole political agenda that needs to be addressed.

Second, in relation to the ways of fighting, a very important point is the human rights movement—and the different human rights movements—may manage **to reflect more critically about the use of these technologies. They are not neutral**, and the companies that own these technologies have thrived, especially the large platforms, such as Google, Facebook, Apple, Microsoft, which are also major political actors, not just economic actors. And what we see, unfortunately, are many human rights movements that, due to necessity, end up adopting those more affordable and obtainable technologies available, without having a perception and a discussion about what it means to use this set of technologies, which, regardless of whether the pandemic continues or not, will continue to be used and, during the pandemic, are used more and more intensively.

This implies reinforcing the monopolistic market positions of these groups, **it implies transferring data and, for human rights advocates, data transfer is a critical issue** because it can be used later by their enemies and law enforcement. If the environmental human rights movement, for example, is transferring data and this data goes to a company that can sell it or sell the access to it to a company that harms the environment, deep down we are feeding a machine that is employed by the enemies of human rights, by the violators of human rights.

So, a fundamental tip is: the agenda for the use of digital technologies and communication needs to be a transversal concern. I always say that we need to learn from the feminist movement, from the black movement, from the LGBTIQA+ movement that, with a correct decision, turned their agendas into transversal concerns for all social movements. I'm not trying to equate the issue here, I just want to say the idea that this issue is present, regardless of which movement it is, and that it is a concern that needs to be incorporated by human rights movements as a whole.

The communication movement – “Lapcom”, “Coalizão Direitos na Rede” already have developed these reflections and, indeed, training initiatives, and what we need to do is to amplify the dialogue between those who are already making these debates and ABONG, the organization networks of human rights, so that we can disseminate this discussion among more organizations.

# Júlio Barbosa

## Conselho Nacional das Populações Extrativistas



**I'm Júlio Barbosa, resident of "Reserva Chico Mendes", I was born here in the state of Acre, in Xapuri, in the rubber plantations.**

I have been a member/activist of the trade union movement for many years. As a young man, I began my activism in the trade union movement, and the beginning of my struggle took place in the "Comunidades Eclesiais de Base" (Ecclesial Base Communities) and later it took place in the trade union movement. I joined the struggle of the trade union movement largely because of the struggles I made part here; I was already part of the movements here within the region. I am the national founder of the "Conselho Nacional das Populações Extrativistas" (National Council of Extractive Populations) through the "Grupo de Trabalho Amazônico" (Amazon Work Group) and I am president of the "Conselho Nacional das Populações Extrativistas" (National Council of Extractive Populations) in my second term. I have been mayor here in my city of Xapuri for two terms and I am also president of the "Associação dos Moradores da Área de Reserva do Xapuri" (Xapuri Reserve Area Residents Association), which is the "Associação Concessionária da Reserva Xapuri" (Concessionary for the Xapuri Reserve Association). This is my background.

Our socio-environmental fight and also the human rights one is closely linked to the resistance for our category to stand strong in our habitat and its forest. So, our struggle has always been in

defence of the territory, the territory we call for collective use, of common use, which are extractive reserves, "Reservas de Desenvolvimento Sustentável" (Sustainable Development Reserves - RDS), the projects of combined agricultural and extractive settlements.



# How do you assess **the struggle of resistance and the confrontation of human rights violations** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

**I think it was the most painful moment we've been through in our journey.** First the pandemic came and no one was expecting it, at least no human being in the world was prepared to face such a pandemic. We coped with it out of the need to resist, to survive. Here in our region, in the Amazon, in the state of Acre, in Xapuri, specifically, we did not usually make what we call a "tie", a "draw" [like in a game, the method of struggle based on peaceful forms of resistance, created by rubber tappers to prevent deforestation] because we thought it was beautiful; we used to make these "draws" because there was a need for it, to defend the living space, our forest, our environment, from where our families were obtaining their livelihoods. The "draw" was an instrument used for this, because it was a very severe situation for us.

The pandemic has not been too much different. It has been very cruel, because it affected the health, the lives of thousands of our friends and relatives. It also forced social distancing and quarantine, creating big physical distances, and this made us not to gather together anymore; when we could meet, it was in a virtual environment, and this virtual meetings they have a privileged audience. I'm talking about the category to which I belong, which the majority of members live in the forests and where they don't even have a phone number, let alone an Internet connection. **To the extent that this population no longer gathered, our territories became very vulnerable and it was then that the famous phrase from last year, which was "open the gate for the herd to pass" (a phrase stated by the Minister of Environment, referring to pass all the Bills necessary to the government's plans), actually prevailed.**

As the pandemic spread out, as the population could not gather, the current government's strategies were to invest against the territories of collective use, against the people's achievements, the secular occupation of the Amazon, the achievements of the settlements. So this motto to "open the gate for the herd to pass" has been actually very strong within our territories.

And this affects not only the survival of this population but also their guarantees. We began to experience a very strong process of insecurity without knowing about the future of our territories with a government "investing" in the National Congress representatives, presenting proposals to dismantle all the legal instruments that were built throughout a long resistance. And, at the same time, it invested through its social networks in unlawful perpetrators who love to commit crimes in Brazil, especially when it comes to land occupation. So, this process of insecurity happened in a very violent way to us.

But, as we have movements, the articulation of socio-environmental movements throughout Brazil and even outside Brazil is very strong and also with some strong "muffled voices" in the National Congress, we managed to resist. And I say that we managed to resist because we are already going through this situation that we faced during this pandemic. It has been very difficult, but I am absolutely sure that we will go through it and we will come out much stronger than when we entered this pandemic.

## How do you assess the fights **to carry out the promotion and achievement of human rights** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

Chico Mendes conveyed this message to all of us that our struggle first needed to be a grassroots work to raise awareness and convince our people, but it needed to be a struggle in which we needed to build many alliances to be together with us. So, to face this problem, if we are alone, we, the extractivists, the people of the forests, alone, we will not achieve that much. **But if we gather together, we will achieve the results we really want.**

## In your opinion, **what are the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic** on the work of human rights advocates?

I think in this case our territories have not been affected by the issue of food shortages so deeply because our population produces their food, but even so, it affected some communities with food shortages and this has been a problem and continues to be a problem that we are still facing.

**From where the advocates stand there is a very strong insecurity.** These people are exposed to threats because the offenders think they own the truth, they think they are capable of solving everything, including through violence, and this has made things more complicated.

## **Would you have suggestions for strategies to strengthen networking** and carry out the popular protection of human rights advocates from the **Covid-19 pandemic?**

**What we have done a lot now is to retake the articulation with the peoples from the forests, the first thing that I find the most important.**

Today we are engaging not only the extractivists, such as indigenous peoples, but also other sectors that are advocates for this cause of human rights, this cause of sociobiodiversity advocacy. And our objective, our intention, our strategy is to increasingly strengthen this movement of participation, of integration, among all segments that advocate for the cause of human rights, which defend human rights advocates, but which also advocate for the socio-environmental cause.

I think we are passing through a very delicate moment. We have some very serious issues that we have to take into account, but I think our big problem today is that we face this genocidal policy by the federal government, not only in relation to the pandemic, but to everything that concerns the rights of the peoples. And we are living here in our region, in the Amazon, coping with this situation, with a government that at all times tries to destroy an entire legacy that has

been built throughout our history. Therefore, there is no other way for us to strengthen the struggle and for those human rights advocates to be protected and for their dreams to be really fulfilled, **other than for us to be really united, very strengthened, with all the segments of advocates for this cause.** I would like to put this as a great responsibility of ours, of the “Conselho Nacional das Populações Extrativistas” (National Council of Extractive Populations), of the Aliança dos Povos da Floresta (Forest People’s Alliance), the understanding we will only achieve success and we will only be able to face this disastrous policy currently in force in Brazil if we are united, strengthened, building networks between us. This is what I wanted to pose as an important issue for the strengthening of our struggle to guarantee the defence of human rights advocates, especially those who live in the forest.

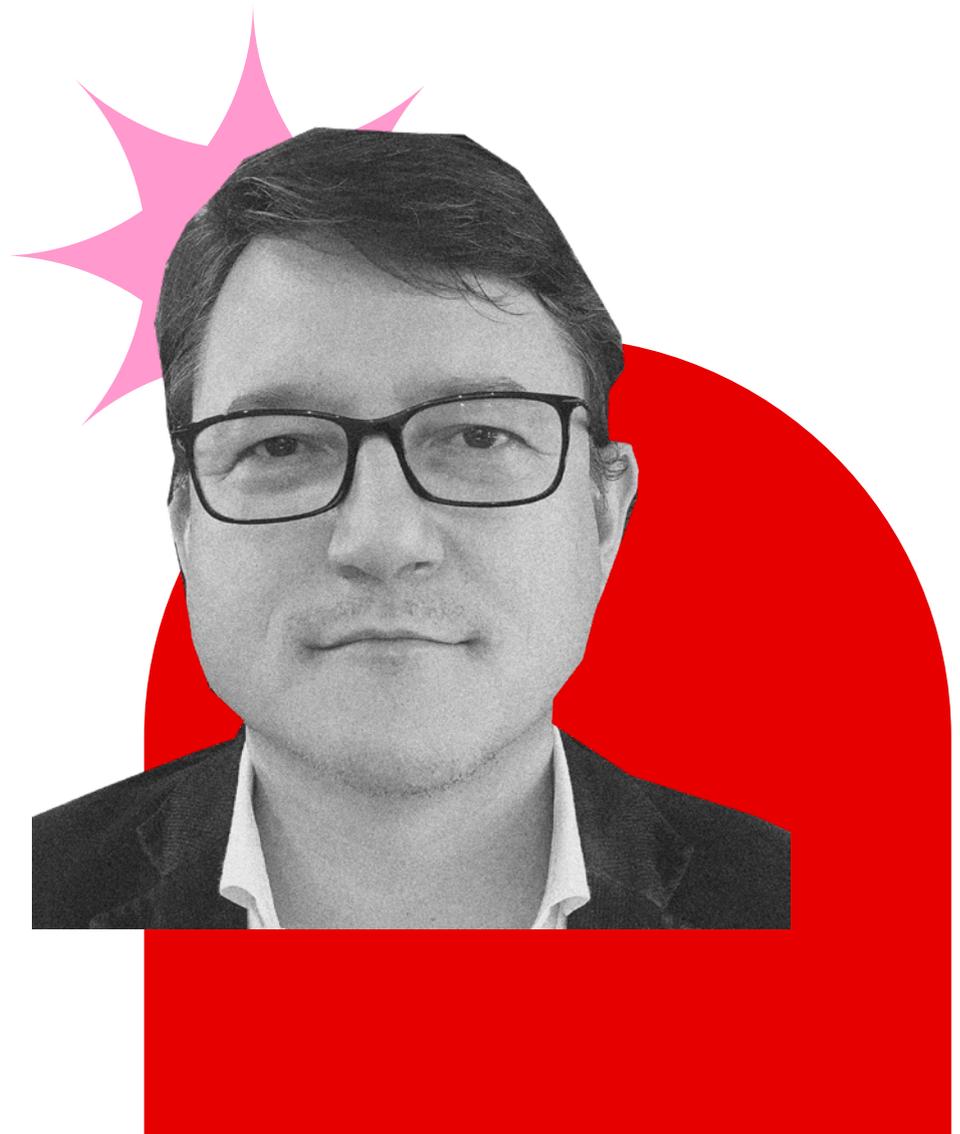
# Leandro Gaspar Scalabrin

## Movimento dos Atingidos por Barragens (MAB)



**My name is Leandro Gaspar Scalabrin, I am a popular attorney, I participate in the “Coletivo de Direitos Humanos do MAB, Movimento dos Atingidos por Barragens” (Human Rights Collective of MAB, Movement of People Affected by Dams), which is also part of “Via Campesina” and representing the “Via” in the “Conselho Nacional de Direitos Humanos” (National Human Rights Council).**

Also as an attorney for a quilombo here in Rio Grande do Sul, MST rural occupations, occupations fighting for housing with the “Movimento Nacional de Luta pela Moradia” (National Movement for the Fight for Housing - MNLM). I am a human rights advocate.



# How do you assess **the resistance effort and the confrontation of human rights violations** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

It has been a very difficult struggle on the part of organizations because the pandemic has prevented them from carrying out popular struggles that are the main way to claim human rights in Brazil and conquer some public policies (which is more difficult) and immediate compensatory measures as well. It has been a very difficult movement from the point of view of the more organized movements and, letting alone those less organized ones. The population has suffered a lot from exclusion, with the aggravation of violations of all their rights: housing, food, public transportation, education, social assistance have become more precarious.

During the pandemic, there was a generalized worsening of the indicators and conditions of these rights. Not to mention the thematic guidelines: **agrarian reform and the demarcation of indigenous and quilombola lands were totally stopped; no new housing projects; standstill of the resources for social assistance, health and education.**

We don't just have the pandemic. Brazil has been going through a serious institutional crisis since 2014, when the result of the election by those who lost was not recognized; then in 2016 it happened the president Dilma Rousseff impeachment and in 2018 another coup d'état initiative, that was to prevent, with lawsuits, the candidate who was leading in the polls and then getting elected the current government, the one we have been dealing with since 2019. And in this new government, from 2019 to 2022, democracy itself has been attacked; the National Congress has been weakened; institutions totally dilapidated and weakened; the press, journalists attacked; the human rights advocates and organizations attacked for their actions; entities prohibited from accessing public buildings to meet with the government, as happened with the MST.

Human rights themselves have been challenged by this government. I have seen as very important the field of action of the institutions, the resistance: the Judiciary power, the institutions of the legal system. And the National Congress itself was to some extent very important to resist all

these attacks on public policies, on rights, practised by major public authorities, state governors, the President of the Republic, his ministers, criminalizing and attacking popular movements. I myself who have always participated in popular movements and always believed that there was the central core of action and resistance, in the context of the pandemic, this dialogue that entities and movements had with State bodies, including the National Council of Human Rights was very important, and together with the "Conselhos Estaduais de Direitos Humanos" (State Human Rights Councils), it was all very important for the resistance in this period that is not over yet and that we do not know how it will end.

We still don't know if we will have elections in 2022, and if we have them, we don't know if whoever wins will be able to take over and if, when assuming, he or she will be able to govern. A coup d'état can happen as it almost happened this year, from February to September 7, in which there was clear action by government agencies, institutions, the army, police riots, Whatsapp groups and groups of congresspeople attacking the institutions; and there was almost a coup d'état in Brazil on the 7th of September (Brazilian's Independence Day).

After that, we experience a certain "stability", but we don't know what it will be like next year. And, in this context, those who went to the streets to demonstrate asking for impeachment, some people, for example, have gotten eye injuries, others were illegally arrested for having banners against the president and were prosecuted under national security law; there have been a police riot. In my city, they destroyed a billboard with a chainsaw, threats to those who demonstrated on the streets. **These are concrete facts of real and symbolic violence against human rights advocates, against people who exercised their right to demonstrate.** As a result of this context, no one occupied the urban area. The people of the poor boroughs, of the housing fight, are afraid, they know that if they occupy an area for housing, there will be this same type of violent repression. There were no occupations by the landless; there were no major mobilizations of those affected by the dams leakage either. This is a little bit of the general context of our country in the pandemic and also during this serious institutional crisis we are experiencing.

# How do you assess the struggles **to carry out the promotion and achievement of human rights** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

There were many mobilizations through social networks. This channel has been very important and they were based on reality: hunger, lack of water in the poor neighbours. There were some actions in the network that made some achievements possible and for this the Congress has been important: emergency financial aid has been a demand that came from popular movements. There were no struggles, there were no specific mobilizations to claim this, but there were social media, by the main national organizations, which had the strength for the National Congress to approve the emergency aid in 2020. It was a very important action that softened the impact of the pandemic. If there was no emergency aid, what we are experiencing today, we would have lived in 2020.

Also, **an outcry for vaccination that made us to have, by mid-2021, this broad vaccination program.** This also resulted from a whole campaign on social networks, in meetings, within collectives, solidarity groups. We had many experiences of solidarity with food, gathering of face masks and raising awareness on the population that had repercussions in institutions and forced the government, even though it was against the vaccine, to carry out a wide vaccination campaign that today is successful. Today, we have vaccinated 75% of the population with the first dose. We vaccinate more than Europe. There, in July 2021, we overtook Argentina, which started vaccination before us.

There were new forms of organization and struggle that took place and materialized in concrete initiatives. From April to June, street demonstrations took place against these attacks on democracy, against famine, for the vaccine. And then we saw this reaction and criminalization. I remember the serious fact, in Pernambuco, where there was a police riot and they shot at the protesters and even at those who were not at the demonstration. One person lost his vision and others were arrested for criticizing this nefarious policy from the presidency of the republic or the state governors.

There were these reactions and these new forms. **I myself, for example, reinterpret the importance of the Judiciary, of the Federal Supreme Court in a series of sentences.** The government itself has a list of 132 Supreme Court sentences that consider the Supreme Court itself is acting in a coup-like manner and against democracy. Hence we see how important it is to have the Federal Supreme Court and some opportunities to dialogue with the National Congress. And there are institutions such as the Federal and State Public Prosecutor's Office, Public Defenders and the Councils of Rights and their networks (CNS, CNAS, Guardianship Councils, etc.) and this institutionality, especially where there is synergy between civil society and the State, which are the councils of rights.

## In your opinion, **what are the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic** on the work of human rights advocates?

Advocates had to defend themselves from the pandemic and defended that this should be the country's public policy: may people avoided agglomeration, social contact, so as not to spread Covid-19. At first, the advocates took this measure, but, at the same time, no one stopped to have contact with the people in the poor boroughs, in the landless occupation camps, in the groups affected by dams leakages or in the quilombola communities. But it was very difficult, a risky job; A lot of people got Covid-19, a lot of people lost their lives. I myself got the disease because I had to do in-person work, I had contact with the virus, I transmitted it to my family. It was very difficult to face the pandemic.



## **Would you have suggestions for strategies to strengthen networking and carry out the popular protection of human rights advocates from the Covid-19 pandemic?**

For human rights advocates, what has been working a lot is that each popular movement that already has the **knowledge from experience of how to protect its activists in situations of arrest, violence or criminalization to do self-defence and this does not happen too much in network, but often by the movement itself and the networks serve to echo, to report these situations, but not really to protect.** In some cases, we were able to knock on the institutions' doors and get support to protect advocates and in other situations we could not, or the advocates themselves did not want this protection.

I am someone who has always been a great critic of the State, of institutionality, and in this period of coup d'état, of lack of democracy, of attack on democratic guarantees and freedoms, we can see how important it is to have some dialogue with institutions. It would be important for us to defend public policies and institutional programs to protect advocates, even with all the flaws and critics we have.

# Léo Pinho

## Central de Cooperativas Unisol Brasil



I'm Leonardo Pinho, currently in the presidency of the "Central de Cooperativas Unisol Brasil" (Unisol Brasil Cooperatives Center).

I am treasurer director of the "Confederação Nacional de Cooperativas" (National Confederation of Cooperatives - Unicopas) and president of the "Associação Brasileira de Saúde Mental" (Brazilian Association of Mental Health - Abrasme). I am a activist for popular cooperativism and for the solidarity popular economy. I exercised the presidency of the "Conselho Nacional dos Direitos Humanos" (National Human Rights Council) in the 2019/2020 administration.



# How do you assess **the struggle of resistance and the confrontation of human rights violations** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

The struggle of resistance when structuring a human rights agenda it is prior to the pandemic, in particular, it is prior to the institutional coup d'état against president Dilma Rousseff's government and also president Temer's one. From that moment on, the deconstruction of public policies associated with an agenda of removal of rights in Brazil accelerates: the Constitutional Amendment 95/2016, labour reform, social security reform. There, a strategy begins with the argument that, by removing rights, economic recovery would take place and would enable a new cycle of growth with income generation. This is not to say that there were no attacks before, but there were no dismantling of public policies.

**Soon after we had an atypical election in democracy**, a government was elected, one that defends torture and clearly agreed with the economic agenda of imposing reforms with the removal of rights. A government diametrically opposed to the human rights agenda, with misogynistic attacks, consistent with what he (Bolsonaro) promised. The pandemic started and, obviously, because of what comes with it – decrease in economic and social activities, social distancing–was soon demonstrating that it would impact the lives of the Brazilian

population regarding employment, access to public services, the right to the city... The times preceding the pandemic were made of attack on human rights, civil rights, economic, social, cultural and environmental rights in Brazil.

## **An explosive combination of pandemic and dismantling of rights.**

In this context, we continue this resistance agenda with more difficulties. Obviously because the forms of social pressure have decreased, we are restricted to the virtual model, the pressures have been restricted to online, which hinders incidence. Especially in this general scenario of regressiveness, of deepening of human rights regressiveness, all over the DhESCAS platform. In environmental law, the advance of mining in indigenous territories has been acknowledged; the government took advantage of the pandemic to deepen a broaden use of pesticides. In civil rights, the emblematic case has been the difficulty in accessing emergency aid because people didn't have a commercial agreement for data transfer, or they didn't have a cell phone. This previous scenario of regressiveness was deepened during the pandemic; as an example we have had the statement of the minister for the environment: to pass the herd to deepen the removal of rights.

# How do you assess the fights **to carry out the promotion and achievement of human rights** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

We have been restricted to the virtual environment. Nobody knew the virtual environment regarding the daily activities of the institutions, even those who already had the practice of holding virtual meetings using these tools. We had difficulties: first, of adapting to technology allied to changes in tools, making it easier for those who had the power in their hands.

Those who didn't have resources (cell phone, data transfer commercial package, wired Internet available at home), did not have the means to advocate or to do "lobby" (lobby in Brasil is not allowed nor regulated and here the has a figurative sense, meaning making pressure on congresspeople). These factors compromised the work of human rights advocates at the beginning of the pandemic.

# In your opinion, **what are the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic** on the work of human rights advocates?

When we talk about human rights, we talk about the two dimensions: economic, social and environmental, and civil rights. About the DhESCAS we can say that, in addition to unemployment, informality, use of legal means to destroy the environment, difficulties in accessing social security rights, we also have the psychosocial impact on people. The Ministry of Health revealed that there was an increase in demand for services related to chemical dependence, both alcohol and other drugs, by more than 60%; depression and medication use increased.

In civil rights, the impact of people not having access to virtual media prevented them from accessing their rights. The population living on the streets and public school students, mainly belonging to the most socially vulnerable populations, had two impacts: hunger and lack of education. Many students were fed through the School Feeding Program and it took more than six months for families to access these foods and another year for municipalities to put this in discussion. In terms of education, the difference between high-income students who had all the technological tools at their disposal and students from public schools was brutal.

Human rights advocates and organizations were also impacted because the means of activating the institutions were virtual. **For example, how could the poorest could activate the Public Defender's Office without Internet and a commercial agreement for data transfer to be able to file a complaint?** Access to justice has also been impacted, everything got very limited. Another example is the mental health system users with the need of permanent access to connect with institutions and professionals. When social distancing has been implemented, many people did not have any online tools, so access to rights, to public policies, has been impacted. The question is: has the government taken measures to address the service to the population living on the streets, to the mental health system users, to give them access to justice, access to the Internet? **No.**

The government, in addition to passing the herd, was omit in the situation of access to rights. Some tried to address the situation in the municipal level, although we know that access to rights is the responsibility of the federal government. When there are no public policies for the resources transfer to the municipalities, the impact is very large.

## **Would you have suggestions for strategies to strengthen networking** and carry out the popular protection of human rights advocates from the **Covid-19 pandemic?**

**The first is that we need to expand and qualify the Human Rights Advocates Program.**

The second is to strengthen spaces for participation and social control. It is necessary that all councillors have access to digital media, especially in the municipalities. When there are national structures with more entities and leaders it is one scenario, but when we look, for example, at Municipal Health Councils, we have users who do not have the minimum conditions of access. So, we have to look at this: these virtual tools will persist, because the pandemic will as well. It is

necessary to build an agenda of participation, of social control, but with the concern of ensuring these counsellors to have access to the Internet.

The third element is to strengthen national human rights networks, such as the MNDH network, the DhESCA Platform and other networks. Strengthen national networks. Sometimes, those who work in national institutions and networks think they can handle the scope and do not value building a network with local and community organizations, which need to be strengthened at their bases and our organizations can contribute to this and

strengthen a mutual exchange of information, of how the dynamics are in the places. Strengthening national strategies with common state and local strategies, joint networking is very important.

Finally, we have a big challenge: the elections. Civil society human rights entities and organizations need to build a national agenda that points out that human rights is not just about fighting police violence, the death of human rights advocates, the most obvious agenda. When talking about human rights, we are talking about a national development agenda, an economic agenda, which means not concentrating income, an agenda to combat inequalities. **Sometimes, the trade union movement does not see the human rights agenda as an agenda that is part of the struggle for labour rights, dealing with the national economic agenda.** It calls for human rights when there is violence in a demonstration.

Changing this vision on human rights is a fundamental task. To present human rights as a proposal for national development that complies with article 3 of the Federal Constitution, which affirms balanced development, the fight against poverty, extreme poverty, and the guarantee of rights. It means making human rights part of society's agenda, proposing a new development model. We are in the year of the bicentennial of Brazilian Independence. What Brazil needs for the next 100 years is this new independence model that comes with a new model of development, based on the premises of human rights.



# Lúcia Secoti

## Movimentos pelos Direitos da Pessoa Idosa



**I'm Lucia Secoti, I've been working with the "Conselhos de Direitos da Pessoa Idosa" (Councils for the Rights of the Elderly) since 2005.**

I have been working on this because my area of research is aging itself, I have a master degree in gerontology.

I have been vice-president of the "Conselho Municipal de Campinas" (Municipal Council of Campinas), I worked on the State Council of São Paulo and on the National Council for the Rights of the Elderly. In the first term 2016-2018, I also worked specifically in the articulation committee with the councils and the social communication; in the second term 2018-2021 I was elected president for the CNDI. In June 2019, the entire collegiate was dismissed by the decree 9.893/2019 issued by the current federal government.



## How do you assess **the resistance effort and the confrontation of human rights violations** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

Civil society has sought to defend, but it has been incipient because **we are having great difficulties in really defending the people** and, in my case, the elderly person during this pandemic context, given the large percentage of deaths are among elderly people.

The National Council for the Elderly was dismissed. Our collegiate was the only one whose presidency was defined by Decree 989/2019. This is an aberration for a democratic process. The second issue is there was a change in this decree in March 2021, but the presidency remained. The “new collegiate” assumed, but what they actually did was increase the representation from three to six – before the dismissal, we were 14 representatives from civil society and 14 from the government.

They took away all possible participation from civil society that is now selected by the Ministry

(and some organizations are putting themselves in this role of being selected by the government); We no longer have an electoral process. It was defined by the Decree that the exclusive presidency will always be exercised by the head of the “Secretaria Nacional de Promoção e Defesa dos Direitos da Pessoa Idosa” (National Secretariat for the Promotion and defence of the Rights of the Elderly) and that the executive secretariat of this collegiate will also be represented and developed by this National Secretariat. **With this we see the social control getting more strict.**

When the pandemic was legally established in March 2020, we saw some movements by civil society seeking to defend the elderly, but we had no social control during this period and this certainly had a very big impact on the defence of the elderly people’s rights.

## How do you assess the struggles **to carry out the promotion and achievement of human rights** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

Despite all the difficulties, we have managed to face this sad moment for the world, this great challenge has been overcome. **We have seen a very large collectivity, the civil society uniting, from different segments.**

I assess that we have been able to move forward, it has been positive. Not in the way we would like or needed, but we have tried to promote the advocacy for human rights, despite the difficulties.



## In your opinion, **what are the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic** on the work of human rights advocates?

The impacts are great all over the world. It has been for everyone. And, in the case of our country, a denialist behaviour intensified these issues during the pandemic. In addition, confusing information; we looked for information on the Ministry of Health website at the beginning, then it has been discontinued. The press is doing this data raising and for us it is very important because the elderly population was the most affected. We know how this mismatch in public policies greatly impacted all people, but even more the age group over 60 years old.

For advocates, as the National Councils were dismantled, the democratic spaces in which a large part of civil society is located; the disarticulation made by the federal government since January 1, 2019 has been severe. The National Council for Food and Nutrition Security (CONSEA) was the first major council to be hit. **It has been challenging and we have to work in a space that is no longer the National Councils, democratic spaces of representation of the civil society.**

We had to work apart of these spaces and it has greatly affected our fights, deepening the issue on the struggle of the human rights advocates in different areas. We have been doing this resistance work and I have followed different segments and the impact has been great for all advocates. If we had these active spaces, as we had been working until 2019, we would certainly have a more powerful defence during pandemic times.

What I also see is that with this disarticulation, we could not do the proper confrontation, the proper social control that should have been done. Regarding the elderly, we did not see any opposition to the issues that we would raise as items of a motion of repudiation, recommendations for us to guarantee the elderly person their rights at a time when many lives were lost.

It has been very difficult not only because of the disarticulation, in some cases the extinction of national collegiate bodies and the rigging that has been done by this government. They criticize so much the rigging made by previous governments, but they have cut off social participation in a very sad way, which undermines democratic assumptions.

# Would you have suggestions for strategies to strengthen networking and carry out the popular protection of human rights advocates from the Covid-19 pandemic?

I will bring it to the elderly field and to the year 2006, way before the pandemic. The first “Conferência Nacional dos Direitos da Pessoa Idosa” (National Conference on the Rights of the Elderly) was about the National Network for the Protection and defence of the Rights of the Elderly. The second, in 2009, also had RENADI as main theme, but it was more of an assessment on the first conference. Even before the pandemic, we were already looking for this work to be done, including me, as president of the National Council for the Elderly, at the time, I sought out the other National Councils to seek this network work to be performed. The proposal was for us to meet once every semester.

The National Human Rights Council accepted the proposal by that time (Leo Pinho was president and attorney Débora Duprat was vice-president), and we managed to start this initiative that later resulted in what is known as the “Comissão Especial de Participação Social” (Special Commission for Social Participation) in which all the councils that were or are linked to the “Ministério da Mulher, Família e Direitos Humanos” (Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights) and were affected by decree 9.759/2019.

I do this retrospective so that we can understand how indispensable it is that we have this effective network for people’s rights. **Human rights is synonymous with dignity. It’s for all people. It is extremely important, yes, that we value this networking.** I see that this work of listening to people from different segments is important, so that we can have an effective national network of protection and here we have a big issue coming in, which is communication. In March 2019, I discussed with Leo Pinho, from the National Human Rights Council, about the importance of being close to each other because the defence of the elderly also interfaces with people with disabilities, children and adolescents, racial equality, LGBTIQA+. We know that this networking is needed. This is the only way we will succeed,

not only as a civil society, but with the Public Prosecutor’s Office, the Public Defender’s Office and several associations with this interest in defending human rights in our country. It’s paramount this networking to happen. That’s why I made a point of talking about these two national conferences for the elderly and our concern to guarantee the rights of the most vulnerable population and make this precious information available to them.

This network needs to be valued, the work needs to be intensified and this communication is indispensable. When I approached people in my work in Campinas and in my fieldwork for the master degree, what they told me most about the Elderly Person Statute and other legislation to protect populations: “I don’t know it, I’ve never read it”. So, this is indispensable and if we could do it as the first thing to be done, to bring people this knowledge and the advocacy of every and each one’s rights.

**I would like to emphasize that social participation is one of the pillars of democracy.** Our Constitution is only pro-citizenship because it brings social participation to this context of redemocratization. We have clearly seen that the federal government has been dedicated to reducing, extinguishing social participation and Brazilian society cannot remain silent on this issue. It is an appeal that I make to all these associations, to the representatives with the councils, so that we can take this issue of the “muffling” of social participation in Brazil to be discussed in all instances-national and international-because there is no defence of human rights without social participation. And as many researchers demonstrate, human rights are the roots of all other rights.

# Makota Célia Gonçalves

Centro Nacional de Africanidade e Resistência Afro Brasileira (Cenarab)



I'm Makota Celinha Gonçalves, I'm a journalist, a social entrepreneur with Ashoka and I'm the general coordinator of the "Centro Nacional de Africanidade e Resistência Afro Brasileira" (National Center for Africanity and Afro-Brazilian Resistance - Cenarab).

Cenarab is a 30 year-old entity; it is present in 18 states of the national territory and it is an entity specifically dedicated to guaranteeing our constitutional right to our traditional practices of African origin and also to the fight against any and all forms of racism, homophobia and for the protection of the black people of this country.



## How do you assess **the resistance effort and the confrontation of human rights violations** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

In this context of the pandemic, the panacea for society has been the social movements because we are living in a denialist State, where our lives do not matter, facing growing fascism, racism, all forms of discrimination. And, in this context of the pandemic, social movement organizations were fundamental to guaranteeing lives. They were the more concerned with the quality of life, with the survival of people, because the Brazilian State was totally omit. I always say that we only shine where there is a total absence of the State, which is a shame. We were supposed to build bridges, build strategies together with the State, but, in the current conjuncture, we have a State of extreme denial, of absence, and in fact, all responsibility ends up on our shoulders.

**In these almost two years of pandemic [December 2021], society owes a lot to the third sector regarding the assurance of life, survival, feeding, because if we depended on the State, we wouldn't have had anything.** If we didn't have social mobilizations, there would be much more deaths by the pandemic or even by famine. Those who are hungry are always in a rush and it was civil society, not the government, who guaranteed food on the table of millions of Brazilians. In 2020 and 2021, these organizations, indeed so discriminated, were, in fact, the salvation of the Brazilian society.

## How do you assess the fights **to carry out the promotion and achievement of human rights** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

The struggles were, are and will be essential, even because we need to think about the post-pandemic, and this social resignification. What is the society - Brazilian and worldwide - in which we will have a post-pandemic? **Society will no longer be the same.**

Social mobilization brings us the guarantee of the importance of organizations. What will be our role? What society do we hope to build? In the black movement we say that "we are on our own". Today, I think that all of us from civil society are on our own because we cannot count on the Brazilian State in this current government.

Social mobilization is essential, including to bring this thread of hope to society. Our role is that of guarantor of rights and this assurance takes place in the daily fights against denialism, fascism, lack of democracy. But, we need to improve our interventions and, for that, it is necessary that we listen: what society do we want for the post-pandemic? **When we ask what to do to protect, we first need to know what to protect from what we expect from a new society.**

Between 2020 and 2021, we had losses not only of human lives, but also losses of natural spaces. Hundreds of spaces in nature reserves died, arsons boosted by greed, irresponsibility. We had more than 620,000 human deaths. We ended up coping with things in the midst of chaos, like popcorn, jumping from here to there to handle it, because we couldn't escape reality in a pandemic. Now the task is to guarantee people's life, survival, dignity. This role of ours is fundamental in this new meaning that we want to give to the State, to society and to our lives, because our lives matter.

# In your opinion, **what are the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic** on the work of human rights advocates?

The beginning of the pandemic brought us a lot of fear, including on our physical safety and we had to organize ourselves within the chaos. **We, who defend these lives, these stories, have seen many of our people to fall, including during their duties.** As advocates for rights, we not only put our lives but our hopes and dreams into this process of securing lives. At no time we stopped being what we propose to be as advocates. I speak for myself, for Cenarab.

At first, even with a lot of fear, a lot of anguish, we knew that many lives would depend on us. I deal with a public that is black, from slums, from poor boroughs, practitioners of “macumba” (Afro-Brazilian religious rites), a public with great potential for the transmission of the coronavirus because they leave their houses, they take public transportation, they are working on a daily basis to guarantee the subsistence of those who were in isolation, and these people indeed carried the virus to the villages and the slums. How do you operate quarantine, social distancing, in a slum shack, where 8, 10 people live under? People say the virus is democratic. The State is the one not democratic, it is not the guarantor of citizenship and dignity for people. Brazilian institutionality has never been able to cover for (to protect) black human bodies. Let alone in a pandemic! And our role was precisely to ensure that these people, despite the social fragility to which they are exposed, could have the bare minimum.

Cenarab received and distributed 16 thousand litres of hand sanitizer. We put all the sewing machines to manufacture face masks, we ordered fabrics, we even made face masks with Non-woven fabric (as much as we knew it wasn't that effective, it was the least we could offer). We have been working here every day since the beginning of the pandemic, taking care of at least 200 families per month. We also had floods in January, causing the destruction of an entire community and we had to stand strong receiving donations of packed meals. There were 160 packed meals for lunch and for dinner for those who had lost their homes. We always felt fear, and there was no vaccine.

We were at risk, at all times, but fear and risk have not stopped us from covering the absence of the State, from trying to bring the people the least amount of comfort. **There are, on average, 300 packed meals a week, 200 food parcels, not counting human affection, the ear to listen, nose to be able to smell, mouth to say a word of comfort, even and also remotely, and still in a process of no time to feel sad, because the absence of the right to mourn is something that marks forever.** I myself, for example, who come from an African-based religious tradition, that gives a lot of meaning to death, as a ritualistic process; I didn't find it easy to see our people passing away like this, without the right to their rituals. We have to re-signify ourselves, even from the perspective of the absence of the grief experience. It's not being easy because the pandemic is not over. Today you have a refreshment that sometimes is even incoherent and dangerous because we don't know what's to come, when we still don't have a number of vaccinated people to ensure broader protection.



## Would you have suggestions for strategies to strengthen networking and carry out the popular protection of human rights advocates from the Covid-19 pandemic?

Despite the importance of our action that safeguards lives, there is still a great deal of hatred towards us coming from the State. In addition to not recognizing us as important in this process, the State still hates us, on behalf of its denialist, fascist administrators. There is a need, at this moment, to create our own network webs that can protect us from these hateful actions, from fascism. We know that we are protecting lives that do not interest fascists. **So we ended up putting ourselves on the front line of risk.**

There is no ready-made formula, but I always say that we need to collectively create outdoor protection strategies, including spaces for complaints, because I do not see, in the short term, a change in the way the State treats us, advocates for rights. And if we don't take care of ourselves, if we don't have alternatives to protect our bodies, we can succumb to fascism. Fascism will look at you and see that you are black, a journalist, a woman and it will destroy you because it doesn't support this diversity, it doesn't support life with dignity.

One of the strategies we need to have is a network web, a panic button. If it happens to any of us, **we need to be prepared to protect our data, the data of our institutions, because in a State of exceptions private data is not protected.** Anyone who lived through the so-called "years of lead" knows very well what the dictatorship's intervention in civil society spaces (unions, entities, black movement) was like. I don't have a formula, but I know that we have to create a network web of protection, a great network of our own, that protects our bodies.

I'm still a very hopeful woman. I am a left-wing woman, "macumba" practitioner and a person who has always enjoyed working under the teachings of Paulo Freire. A black individual, in this diaspora, has to manage, even, to live with hope. I believe that we need, more and more, to create bridges because we already have too many walls and bridges are also built with hope. We have to invest in the conjugation of the verb to hope.

# Mônica Alkmin

## Movimento Nacional de Direitos Humanos (MNDH Brasil)



I'm Mônica Alkmin, I'm in the national coordination of the "Movimento Nacional de Direitos Humanos" (National Human Rights Movement - MNDH), but my institutional reference is the "Organização de Direitos Humanos Projeto Legal" (Human Rights Organization Project Legal) whose main headquarters are Rio de Janeiro.

I am also an advisor to the "Conselho Nacional dos Direitos Humanos" (National Human Rights Council - CNDH), representing the MNDH. Representing "Projeto Legal", I participate and I am an ambassador for the Family for Every Child Network. For the MNDH, I participate in the "Coalizão Sul" (Southern Coalition), which involves some countries in South America that have discussions focused on children and adolescents, but not exclusively, and I also work in the coordination of the "Fórum Estadual de Defesa da Criança e do Adolescente" (State Forum for the defence of Children and Adolescents), in the state of Rio de Janeiro.



## How do you assess **the resistance effort and the confrontation of human rights violations** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

We are obviously experiencing a blatant health pandemic, but in this period we also realized how the absence of public policies, of continued rights and the strengthening of these policies has been latent. We have a “Sistema Único de Saúde” (Unified Health System - SUS), a vaccination infrastructure that, if were all strengthened, would give us the conditions to go through the pandemic not with as much difficulty as we went through in this permanent state of attack.

Social participation and access to information (transparency) are some pillars of the democratic State that have been continuously attacked in these pandemic times. The issue of information is not just to make it known, but to know for the proper definition of strategies. And this government not only limited access to official information, but also manipulated this information and this resulted in a very big difficulty in the decision-making flowchart.

Another issue, which did not start with the pandemic, but just taking a momentary picture of this current government, is about the attacks both on the mass media and attacks and criminalization of the non-governmental organizations and also to the participation of these organizations in the continuous discussion of public policies and human rights. We had to fight and to resist to the aggravating factor, in Brazil, from these other attacks beyond the health matter. How many deaths would we have avoided if more robust and concrete flows of public policies had been defined, if we had purchased vaccine shots, strengthened investment in universities and in the research structures Brazil already has? So, civil society is fundamental at this moment because it organized itself to ensure that the rights already seized were not removed.

## How do you assess the fights **to carry out the promotion and achievement of human rights** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

Speaking about the place where I am standing – the CNDH and the MNDH – we had a greater need for contact, even if it was through a display. **A necessity and an opportunity to be closer because the fight needed us to be closer; because information about violations and violences became more direct and more continuous:** attacks on journalists, massacres, death of indigenous leaders, MST ones. There is no longer any way for us to have an occasion contact, in an assembly. Now, we have to be connected all the time, with new strategies.

Due to our Brazilian cultural characteristics, activism is made by us gathering together in-person, but we have learnt to deal better with the remote meeting. The movements have been reluctant to this, but we needed it, because it has

been a pandemic and because the violations happens on a daily basis. And not only violence to the bodies, but to our action, to our organization, to our participation. We needed to be closer to discuss new strategies. And we created new contact strategies, we started to use more the international systems. We also need to discuss beyond borders, as we are talking about a global reality, even with the countries’ specificities.

This period also brought us closer to groups that already used these strategies of articulation, mobilization and struggle through networks with great quality, such as youth. And the more traditional networks of contacts with us needed to review, add up other strategies of fight through the networks.

# In your opinion, **what are the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic** on the work of human rights advocates?

There are very definite questions because of the pandemic. Of course, we are not going to eliminate the continuous and constant struggle for human rights because that is how it has been since the invasion of Europe and there was no Brazil yet. But, in this period of the pandemic, we could acknowledge the criminalization of organizations which is also, in practice, the criminalization of the fighters. In some spaces, violence comes not only from the persecution on the initiatives, but from the persecution of the person itself. Leaders – women and men – were murdered.

In this period, we had some fronts that were attacked the most: the fight for a decent life on earth – in the countryside, in the city, in the waters – has been heavily attacked, not only in the pandemic, but since the beginning of this government. And this fight is enhanced during the pandemic. A specific example the fight for not giving back land or property, both in the city and in the countryside, against evictions. We had an increase in families that started to have the street as a housing reference. The CNDH launched a regulation to avoid evictions in this period of the pandemic because there were no housing policies, nothing for housing recovery. In the city this was very strong because the guidance was to be at home, to sanitize themselves a lot, to avoid contact. **How is that for those who live on the street, for those who are in the occupying camps?**

In this government, something that is continuous are the independent, non-interconnected policies and, in this period, they were perceived by the activists for the fight: there is no way to talk about health and prevention without talking about the housing policy, access to drinking water (we still have a very low rate of housing with basic sanitation). So, some struggles were more perceived by civil society and, therefore, greater support was needed for these fights, for advocates, in addition to the obvious fight for health.

The persecution of civil society, women, black women, in this period that coincides with the pandemic, but already a characteristic of the government, has been institutionalized as a practice. Police and institutional violence has been much greater. In Rio de Janeiro, we have support from a Supreme Court sentence to not carrying out police operations in the slums during the pandemic period, but the state government and the police were standing against this position, strategically trying to formulate ways to bypass the determination. **And we had massacres in Jacarezinho, in Salgueiro. I mention this example because it was a decision for the period of the pandemic, with the disobedience of the state government.** So, the fight of the advocates needed to have more precise focuses because of all the development that a pandemic brings to us.

# Would you have suggestions for strategies to strengthen networking and carry out the popular protection of human rights advocates from the Covid-19 pandemic?

We have to learn to better deal with this remote operations because of the risks it brings us—not only because of the excess of false information that circulates, but also because of the difficulty of knowing exactly who is accompanying us. We experienced this a lot in the beginning, 2020 and 2021.

**In seminars, political training and using online tools, we learned to deal with strategies to protect our conversations**, our fights and also for tactics of dissemination, in order to offer a counterbalance to the excess of viral fake news. This is a strategy that we increasingly need to learn to deal with because it came to stay. And we need to leverage that. Hence the other issue that comes to us about regions of the country that do not have the same quality of access to the network that others have. This already shows a difference that has to be addressed. If this is going to be one of the strategies, then we need to start addressing this constraint, regardless of the pandemic.

The MNDH organizations are all over the national territory and have different fights; the MNDH is not a thematic network. Discussions come from claims made by the state councillors. The MNDH already brings this characteristic that the protection of the advocate takes place in two moments.

One moment is to enhance work because they are acting in defence of some group or some fight; this is a fundamental issue and it is necessary that national networks and maybe a national project approach this strengthening of the advocates fights. Another moment is when they are being threatened because of their performance. First, protection has to be made so that they do not stop working, but they need a local network that guarantees their performance and physical protection. This network has to take place in the territory because that is where the threat takes place and where protection takes place. Any national project that does not have this approach that it is the territory that has to be strengthened is not protecting the advocate, but a broad fight, which also has its importance.

The Project Seeds (“Projeto Sementes”), in which several organizations and networks strengthen the constant fights in the territories, brings out this: the reconnection with the national networks, which can acknowledge the fact that even with strategic specificities in their actions, we are working together. We advocates, fighters, and we are in networks that reconnect, with intersections. But the fundamental intersection is the fight itself, the belief that we are in this struggle together. **Being here as MNDH, in the face of Abong and other partners in this proposal, is the most important thing about this Project, because the next steps will be taken, jointly, because it is with the collective that the fight is strengthened.**

# Ronilson Costa

## Comissão Pastoral da Terra (CPT Nacional)



**My name is Ronilson Costa, I have been an agent with the “Comissão Pastoral da terra” (Pastoral Land Commission - CPT) for twenty years, currently I am in the National Coordination. During most of this journey, I worked on the state of Maranhão CPT team, one of the most challenging regions for traditional, family farmers communities and peoples, and for pastoral agents or social movement activists.**

Initially I worked at the CPT Regional with records of conflicts and reports of threatened and under conflict communities, then I went to the countryside to work with the grassroots, a strong desire I had to work there with the community.

In the case of Maranhão, the context is the so-called Legal Amazon, where agribusiness capital advances, generating intense conflicts in the dispute over territories already occupied by traditional communities. The State has been a faithful ally of Capital and an enemy of the peoples of the countryside and forests. This has been going on for decades and today many companies operate with their own private security. In fact, there were situations where real militias acted, gunning, threatening and expelling with the force of the weapon. It is a tense and violent context.

The territories occupied by quilombolas, indigenous people, coconut extractors, riverside settlers, and fishermen are under constant dispute. Maranhão is still an agricultural frontier where agribusiness expands. Land grabbing and invasion of territories are violent actions that have caused the death of many family farmers, indigenous and quilombola leaders.

The fight for rights is the fight in defence of life, so we act on this front with a very clear objective, which is to defend people’s lives and also the nature. The life we defend goes beyond the body,

it also comprises the customs of the community, the behaviours, the daily tasks and the way they organize themselves, and also all the elements that make up that territory creating the basis of the economic production and social reproduction of that community. My work follows this trajectory, what the CPT proposes to do: “Being a solidarity presence among the people and walking together with them in the sense of contributing to their political organization and contributing in the coping with the pathway of those who are suffering”.



# How do you assess **the struggle of resistance and the confrontation of human rights violations** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

The CPT has a pedagogical practice, but also a prophetic one, which is related to the documenting and the reporting of conflicts. We classify 2020 as a very tragic year for communities and with the pandemic it became even worse. We immediately tried to adopt social distancing and we were unable to communicate with many communities, since most of the people that we follow up did not have a cell phone or other means of communication. With those we managed to have some contact with, we made every effort to guide them to maintain social distance, avoid contact with the city and, when necessary, also to adopt internal protocols.

Many communities were able to adopt internal security protocols, however many of them had constraints. **The countryside, which became the safest place for them, ended up being "attacked", many people left the cities going to these places more protected from contagion from the new coronavirus.** They were relatives, friends or strangers who arrived without being tested or showing any kind of concern for the community. In short, all that precariousness that still exists in those communities that did not have access to tests, vaccines, the way it should be.

While the communities adopted their strategies, the Brazilian State was practically very well articulated with the oppressive sectors perpetrators of violence, helping the herd to pass: less law enforcement, several projects authorized in order to benefit those who acted in the field of agribusiness, mining, in short, death projects. In the National Congress, several controversial bills were being discussed already in an advanced stage. These were situations that made this reality of the communities even more difficult, not to mention that the protection agencies, the land agencies, the Public Prosecutor's Office, the Public Defender's Office also adopted service protocols that made it very difficult for the community to have access to pressure them, difficult to address something remotely. All this was a big loss.

The year 2020, in our historical series of records, was the year that had the highest rate conflicts occurrence: 2,254 occurrences involving one million people in situations of threat, physical violence, imprisonment. The reasons why were defending their territories, the rights of nature, their way of life, resisting. **The Amazon region was responsible for 62.4% of the occurrences, 60.8% of the families affected in the country, which has qualified the region as the most violent for those who are in the countryside, in the forest, the riverside people, in short.**

And the main agent causing this violence was the federal government itself, articulated with the National Congress: the intentional downgrading of Incra, Funai, Ibama, making the performance of these enforcement and service bodies to the demands of the communities unfeasible, which made it easier for there to be many invasions in the territories. The federal government was responsible for 33% of the occurrences; in addition to agribusiness farmers, miners, loggers, land grabbers, companies in general, they are responsible for 84% of violence cases in the countryside. Indigenous people were the most affected (42%) and in addition to the quilombolas (17%), the squatters who have been there for decades (15%) and the landless (10%), then you have a very high number of people, communities that suffered from the violences, above all, perpetrated by the gunmen, the militia. And the most worrying thing is that there are reports that criminal factions are already working with these sectors for the communities to abandon their lands and this is extremely serious.

# How do you assess the struggles **to carry out the promotion and achievement of human rights** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

Acting alongside the advocacy for peoples and communities, their ways of life and territories has been extremely dangerous in Brazil. In our training process, in our meetings, communities discuss the process of self-protection, so that how they have to protect themselves is not something coming from the outside. We have a very prejudiced society to those who are indigenous, black, female, LGTBQA+, to those who are in the most vulnerable situations, who end up suffering even more because, sometimes, it is the police that arrive without any mercy, the State omitting itself, the justice system that does not give the relevance it should give when a leader is threatened or murdered.

The term human rights advocates sometimes omits the diverse identities of people's fighters for their territories. I think they want to be recognized as they identify themselves. When an indigenous person goes to the COP and faces the Scottish cold and puts on his traditional clothes, maybe he wants to affirm that they want to be seen as an indigenous and not as an advocate for human rights, although they are one. **This is very generic and sometimes does not converse to these identities that are extremely important.**

## In your opinion, **what are the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic** on the work of human rights advocates?

The first fact that we felt is that the internet and the media are very undemocratic in our country. We have a very large portion of the population that lives in the countryside without access to these means. So, in this context of a pandemic, of isolation, how would you be able to keep the follow-up, this relationship with these groups, these people?

**For many communities, isolation has also distanced them from other supplementary income dynamics, such as exhibiting their products at the fair every week.** Many communities are highly productive, they produce to sustain themselves and also to trade, so the food security of these communities has been greatly compromised.

Another difficulty was access to bodies that must respond to the demands of the communities. The protocols adopted by them did not allow easy access considering the communities realities. Another thing that caused irreparable damage was the loss of the guardians of the memory of

the indigenous peoples, the quilombola peoples, that feature a very strong oral communication dimension and some of these guardians could not resist to Covid-19 and with them, we have buried a journey, the information, the knowledge about that people.

On the other hand, the pandemic exposed the situation of abandonment of the communities not recognized by the Brazilian State, which define themselves as quilombola or indigenous, thus revealing the total absence of public policies and the need to make demonstrations to have access to vaccine as priority groups. These are impacts that had a strong effects on these peoples, advocates, fighters from and for the people.



## **Would you have suggestions for strategies to strengthen networking and carry out the popular protection of human rights advocates from the Covid-19 pandemic?**

Strategies have to start from a respectful approach of the movements, the entities, of those who are there at the front end, because sometimes we arrive and think that there are points that can fit into that reality and when we cannot hear the community properly, knowing the internal processes, sometimes co-opting may occur. In each situation, we need to allow this discourse to build self-protection strategies and we need to converse with this, with this behaviour. Several peoples are saying that they want support, but they want to converse, decide together.

In terms of communication, **responsible communication is needed, which does not expose advocates who do not have a security apparatus.** Sometimes communication strategies are flawed, they do not assess local particularities and what is possible to happen.

We are in an extremely delicate situation, we have a totally unfavourable political scenario for those who are defending the territories, for those who are sided with people there. But hope also comes with the people and the fight. For people who are in this situation of supporters, we feel fed when these fighters of the people, for their territories, their ways of life remain standing, they continue to resist and say that they do not give up on that they are entitled to. This encourages us, strengthens us, makes us more available to support these struggles.

# Roseane Dias

## Sociedade Maranhense de Direitos Humanos (SMDH)



**I'm Roseane Dias, from the "Sociedade Maranhense de Direitos Humanos" (Maranhão Society of Human Rights). I am a social worker and I work with traditional communities in two regions of the state of Maranhão.**

The Society was founded in 1979, in the context of the struggle for the human rights agenda. It is an organization that carries out actions in the field of incidence, popular protection, training in human rights, articulating movements, institutional dialogues, proposing legislation; monitoring of rural violence in Maranhão and participates in spaces for the construction of public policies (for a long time I participated in the State Council for Human Rights) and participated in the construction of a law that creates a mediation mechanism in situations of judicialized conflicts.

The SMDH has a wide range of activities with traditional communities and, in this field, it also thinks about popular protection, which is carried out together with the community and partners, protection measures built by the movements themselves in the context of threats. It also provides protection as a public policy: it develops the state program for the protection of human rights defenders and protects threatened victims and witnesses both in the state

of Maranhão and at the national level. It also seeks to strengthen the process of building networks with the Project "Sementes de Proteção", together with partners. Other very important actions are also: research, monitoring and institutional dialogue on bias within the broader incarceration agenda and human rights reparation actions through complaints to international mechanisms.



## How do you assess **the resistance effort and the confrontation of human rights violations** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

We have seen the deepening of structural violations that we have always followed: **violence in the countryside; institutionalized violence inside and outside prison units; violent deaths committed not only by public agents, but also by ordinary citizens**; the precariousness of some public policies that should aim at the fulfilment of human rights.

At this moment of the pandemic, we are experiencing a very destructive process of a set of achievements that we have obtained with many difficulties and also a very challenging period regarding the dismantling of Democracy and the Rule of Law, of public policies and normative milestones.

It is also important to highlight the advancement of the agribusiness forces, of mining sector, and of the so-called clean energy generation on traditional territories and have seen the Brazilian

State authorizing these endeavours to advance on these communities causing contamination, death, and all sorts of violations.

This context challenged us to think or rethink many practices. The Sociedade felt forced to rethink its working instruments, its tools, the ways of monitoring violations and the relationships it establishes with the groups with which it is in straight contact. In addition to learning, this also exposed situations such as the lack of electricity in some communities, very distant Internet point of access, lack of cell phone access in several communities, lack of adequate technological equipment. It is a moment of extreme challenges and limitations, but the movements are characterized by creativity and inventiveness and we all had to learn together with them how to think about monitoring even remotely.

## How do you assess the struggles **to carry out the promotion and achievement of human rights** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

**We didn't stop.** There was a lot of movement by the social movements, of grassroots groups, of articulation networks trying to do their front end work, and also the collective confrontation. We participated very actively in the articulations of the National Human Rights Movement (MNDH), of the project Articulation for the Monitoring of Human Rights (AMDH) that prepared complaint reports of human rights violations in the context of Covid-19. In addition to the MNDH, the AMDH brings together the "Processo de Articulação e Diálogo Internacional" (International Articulation and Dialogue Process - PAD) and the "Fórum Ecumênico Act Brasil" (Act Brasil Ecumenical Forum - FEACT Brasil). The set of complaints systematized and forwarded to national and international bodies is an indicator of this effort

to face these challenges, both in the context of the pandemic and from the point of view of democracy, of the fulfilment of human rights.

In the field of incidence, there has been a lot of action in the fight against land grabbing in Brazil; monitoring over the human right to health; follow-up of the traditional peoples and communities. And today we are participating in many movements that discuss the year 2022 and the pathway we have trailed, in these last two years, it allows us to deepen the discussions about the project we want to Brazil. We are at a very favourable moment to discuss which human rights we want to see fulfilled and the democracy we want.

The Society held livestream events (“café com direitos humanos” - coffee with human rights”) that allowed to discuss with partners, researchers, movements, the fundamental topics such as: criminal bias, incarceration, democracy, well-being, popular protection, violence in the countryside. We still have the challenge of thinking about a reconstruction, reviewing everything that we saw dismantled in the last two years. Looking at the history of our country, there

has never been a lack of courage, willingness and will to continue this struggle. And the movements, in this broader form, have placed themselves in this great mission and we have to look for more missionaries so that we can have a project built by the people. The challenge is great, but also great is the hope, in the same way as Paulo Freire thought: **we are not waiting, we are doing and keeping hope because that is what moves us all the time.**

## In your opinion, **what are the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic** on the work of human rights advocates?

Some challenges we faced were the issue of communication and Internet access. Here we have an interesting aspect, which is the importance of partners who can collaborate with this process to protect communities, such as a trade union, a parish, sometimes a human rights centre. We managed to maintain this communication through partners, which we used to be able to hold a meeting with the communities. Another thing we did was to help the people from the communities to handle the equipment and guide them on how they could talk to us. This shows a little of our difficulties and, at the same time, what we discover about facilitating elements of communication.

Another challenge was the video call process, since the way of struggle and life in traditional communities is expressed by oral tradition. We started to prepare the activities little by little and asking the communities to bring up how the situation was, which were the constraints on vaccination; guided them how to record an audio if they had difficulty writing and so we learned to build these activities little by little. Carrying out this monitoring remotely reaffirmed for us the need to strengthen protection networks. **Without this, we would not be able to think about protecting both people linked to the movement and new partners.**

In addition to all this, we had to live with the advancement of companies towards traditional territories, which profoundly worsened some conflicts, promoted many violations and deaths; slowness of vaccination in traditional communities; fake news, even produced by the President of the Republic himself; and anti-vaccination activism by evangelical churches in some indigenous communities. Facing these challenges as communities together with organizations brings out many lessons to be learned. One of them was the forms of resistance and self-protection measures.

# Would you have suggestions for strategies to strengthen networking and carry out the popular protection of human rights advocates from the Covid-19 pandemic?



We have discussed this a lot in the Society. The popular protection networks have some levels of incidence. We are at the forefront of the work that is the fulfilment of human rights with traditional communities through the recognition of their territories. **And it is in that place where the community lives, organizes itself, builds its bonds of belonging, that the popular protection network has to start.** The grassroots work, the strengthening of this resistance is fundamental and, for this, the process of education for human rights is very important to understand that reality.

But we also need to dialogue, strengthen ties with another level, which could be the local one. Another level of articulation can be regional or state. It is essential that we think about our actions in a collective and planned way, with different segments monitoring the situations, carrying out surveys and thinking together how to act in a context of threats to communities, not only in direct monitoring, but in incidence actions and complaint reports to bodies of control on public policies.

**The popular protection network for us is an action that has to be born in the fieldworks of the movement; we're talking about a historic mark, the protection we've always done for the fight.** We wouldn't have these struggles if it weren't for the construction of these protection networks for advocates – not armed protection, but a policy that counts on a network of collaborators, of protectors.

The agents of human rights violations have never slept and we have kept ourselves with many limitations, but standing. The journey is challenging, but it is leaving marks that will help us think about the task of rebuilding our country.

# Rosilaine Ferreira

## Movimento Nacional dos Catadores de Materiais Recicláveis (MNCR)



### **My name is Rosilaine Mendes Ferreira, a.k.a. “Neginha”.**

I am a recyclable material collector, representing the state of Paraná for the “Movimento Nacional dos Catadores de Materiais Recicláveis” (National Movement of Recyclable Material Collectors - MNCR) and for the MNCR National Commission. I am also with “Unicatadores” and “Instituto Lixo e Cidadania”. My main activity is aimed at collectors and, today, being this representative, I am part of two cooperatives: Catamare, the cooperative where I began, and Cataparaná, which was created to networking.

My main agenda during the pandemic was the right of the collectors to work. We were always in the risk group. We have always worked with the greatest risks, since selective collections in general never come the way they should: a lot of hospital waste comes in. And many things that shouldn't be in selective collection. In the pandemic it was no different, so our performance

was the guarantee to work and we also had to act in a kind of “welfarism” way, getting to procure food parcels and Personal Protection Equipment (PPEs) so that the collectors could continue to work.

I also work with women, seeking to empower them, so they do not suffer from domestic violence and also from violences at work. Today the reality has changed a little, but the fact is that, within the cooperatives, the largest number of collectors

are women, but the leadership position has always been occupied by men and women felt somehow oppressed or violated. We have been working for some time so that they occupy this place in first hand and that they do not suffer from violence either at home or at work.



## How do you assess **the struggle of resistance and the confrontation of human rights violations** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

In the pandemic, it was very difficult to assure work because, instead of the public power to assure it, sheds were impeded to operate, collection on the streets was forbidden so to the authorities would not be “bothered” with what could happen due to the pandemic. **We had a very big discussion with the municipalities**

**to show that our work has always been this way, there have always been risks and the pandemic would not only harm only the collectors, but the population in general.**

Closing the sheds or not would not be the solution. So, that was our main job: assuring the income of the collectors.

## How do you assess the fights **to carry out the promotion and achievement of human rights** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

The fight has been very difficult. Thank God we had a lot of support from the Labour Public Prosecutor's Office (MPT) and the State Public Prosecutor's Office (MPE) in Paraná. The MPT managed to create a network that, nationally, issued notes with the obligations of the municipalities that were: **to promote work, to assure PPEs, and a minimum income in the pandemic.** The MNCR and the “Instituto Lixo e Cidadania” (which is the institution that helps in this discussion between the municipalities and the collectors), as facilitators of the discussion of human rights, managed to guarantee the work of the collectors.

I think Paraná was one of the few states that didn't lockdown completely; there were some municipalities that, over time, we managed to reopen activities. We managed to prevent several municipalities from making this prohibition. Thanks to this support, it became easier for us to discuss with the municipalities so that the collectors could continue to guarantee the production.

It has been exhausting. Taking into account the lockdown, many municipalities that were already acting in bad faith took the opportunity to close their doors, so as not to dialogue.

So, sometimes we had a lot of difficulty accessing the municipalities. Many collectors still work in the shed, in some belonging to the municipality and, being like this, the municipalities could close them. **Then, we used to try having a debate, but we couldn't gather together because of the pandemic; many times people did not want to hold even an online meeting.** It was very exhausting, very intense, especially at the beginning of the pandemic, for us to guarantee the work, the first needs of the collectors.

## In your opinion, **what are the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic** on the work of human rights advocates?

We started to feel the difficulty of the collectors with the prices increasing; children at home; the amount of material decreasing in within our associations sheds, when they were in lockdown. So, we started to provide this “welfarism” that we hadn't done for many years. Thank God we got a lot of partners: local companies, the “Associação Nacional dos Carroceiros e Catadores de Materiais Recicláveis” (National Association Recyclable Material Collectors - Ancat), some sectors of the state government, which donated food parcels. We managed to distribute more than 10 thousand food parcels in the state of Paraná and we reached more than 200 associations of collectors with guaranteeing that one food parcel per collector per association arrived.

We have a large percentage of mothers who are heads of families who, in addition to seeing their income decrease, had to “make it happen” and take care of their children and also having to work. It has been a gigantic difficulty for the collectors to keep the doors open at work, and when the doors were open, mothers could not get to work because they had children at home who had no school, day care, etc. It was very difficult at the beginning of the pandemic until they got it right, got someone to take care of the children so they wouldn't leave them helpless. **So we had to arrive with these parcels collectors and they could at least keep the staple food at home.**

## **Would you have suggestions for strategies to strengthen networking and carry out the popular protection of human rights advocates from the Covid-19 pandemic?**

I believe that, more than ever, **the segments have to get together, and even more when it comes to the current government not caring about minorities, about the poor boroughs.** All the segments have to get together because they have common layers. I am with the “Movimento Nacional dos Catadores de Materiais Recicláveis” (National Movement of Recyclable Material Collectors), which is composed mostly by black people, women suffering from abuses, single mothers, all abandoned by the states and municipalities. More than ever, social movements have to get together to make themselves to be listened to.

It is very difficult when you arrive in the municipality to talk about the collectors and talk about domestic, child and adolescent violence. I end up not being listened to because they think our focus is exclusively on recyclable material. And it's not! Our focus is on people, quality of life, human dignity, no to violence, no to child labour. And I think that passes through all social movements. We have a main cause, but it breakdowns into several other problems along the line of what we are looking for.

To make themselves to be listened to and to achieve a little more success in our fights for guaranteed rights, social movements should get together. Because, if we start to overlap with each other, one will get a piece of bread, the other a rotten apple, but things will not really be addressed. We have to try to work more together, to get closer. We have indeed started a closer dialogue with the homeless population. We are siblings as movements, but we have to expand: we have to approach housing, LGBTIQA+. More people have to come to this debate, so we can make more rumour to have the chance to explain what is happening.

We see the consequences of the pandemic everywhere, even on those who didn't get the disease. I suffer from from severe anxiety episodes and my son developed diabetes thanks to Covid-19. These are things that could happen in the future, but with the lockdown and isolation, with the despair in the face of things happening, they came earlier. People died because hospital beds were fully occupied. These are sequelae of Covid-19. We have to broaden this debate hoping that no one develop these sequelae. We can see things have started to move towards normality, but I think our normal will never exist again and if we don't get together, don't properly focus the fights, we'll end overlapping with each other.

I think these surveys are very important. But we shall really sit on the table to dialogue and, together, to advance a little further. The Project “Sementes” (Seeds” can give us more support or to facilitate some kind of dialogue with different people in order to amplify these debates and bring more benefits to the categories, not only to the collectors. It is very important that we see the reflection of all this, but from now on, what are we going to do? Are we going to wait for the bombs to explode so we can extinguish the fire? We need to get prepared. Of course, I cannot be sure of anything, but I believe that the new normal will not be the normal it used to be, so we have to prepare for 2022 to not be so helpless as we were in 2020, with everyone being surprised and also greatly impacted. 2021 has not been nice, but we learned to co-exist with Covid-19 and for 2022 **we have to anticipate some problems so they shall not repeat.**

# Symmy Larrat

Associação Brasileira de Lésbicas,  
Gays, Bissexuais, Travestis,  
Transexuais e Intersexos (ABGLT)



**I am Symmy Larrat, from the state of Pará, I have been advocating in the field of human rights since the student movement, for the right to communication and I have been working in the LGBTIQA+ movement since I was in Pará.**

I worked in public administration, with Dilma Rousseff's government and, with the city hall of São Paulo, coordinating the "Programa Transcidadania" (Program TransCitizenship) during Mr. Haddad's government. I also coordinated a facility for the promotion and advocacy for LGBTIQA+ human rights in Salvador, state capital of Bahia. Today I am with Casa Neon Cunha, which is an LGBTIQA+ NGO promoting shelter for abandoned people, and I am president of the "Associação Brasileira de Gays, Lésbicas, Bissexuais, Travestis, Transexuais e Intersexos" (Brazilian Association of Gays, Lesbians, Bisexuals, Transvestites, Transsexuals and Intersex - ABGLT).



## How do you assess **the resistance effort and the confrontation of human rights violations** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

It is very important that we take action in this field of human rights during this pandemic because today we live a false feeling that we have reached the so-called normality. But this normality is false in many ways: we are still facing the pandemic, it is improving; we do not have a clear policy to protect people; and we have an escalation of vulnerabilities, absences, and violations (evictions,

physical violence, etc.) that we already experienced before the pandemic; several perpetrated by the state and violations in various fields. So, we need, more than ever, to landmark this activism in the field of human rights because **the biggest share of the population is the most impacted in this process.**

## How do you assess the fights **to carry out the promotion and achievement of human rights** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

Since the beginning of the pandemic, we have had to re-signify a lot of things, particularly the methodology of action in areas and on demands we were not used to, such as the field of social assistance, for example, with regard to combating hunger. **Food security is a very elitistic term. What is really happening in Brazil is that the most vulnerable populations have returned to the hunger context.** And we have had to figure it out how we, movements in the field of human rights, especially those with specific populations, would deal with this as we worked a lot in guaranteeing, protecting and advocating for rights. And we have had to sum-up.

We used to work with social assistance in other aspects, such as housing, the right to social programs and hunger arrived as an urgent demand and with it we came to witness the escalation of those violations already in place: exclusions, violence, unemployment, lack of housing, prejudice, lack of access to rights and also physical violence. For the transgender population, for example, during the period of greatest social isolation, murders increased by 70%. In 2020, seven murders of LGBTIQ+ human rights advocates were reported and we have already overcome that number in 2021. So, people who defend this population have received more attacks, more threats, because people were made more vulnerable in this process.

We had to re-signify the methodology, to use the Internet, social networks, apps, to reach, communicate and interact. And, in the field of social control, we also had to use these tools, but the methodologies that the State put in place to carry out social control excluded us more than they allowed us to participate. We saw that the agendas against us arrived very quickly in the Legislative Houses. The number of votes favourable and the agenda for pro-LGBTIQ+ people, black people, women, indigenous people, in short, were insufficient. **Only the agenda for rights removal thrived, while nothing has been made for assuring rights.** We had a lot of difficulty making political incidence during this period, but we learned little by little how to deal with it.

Now we are able to do demonstrations, but we passed through a period when we could not be on the streets. So, how would we show this social strength, our public anger? We had a huge loss in the fields of health and education because Covid-19 has been used to terminate and delay these rights, but we anticipated a few years of learning using the networks. We need to advance in terms of safety, protection of people in the field of human rights in social networks, because in this process we got more exposed.

I talked about the use of social networks to promote intersectional and resistance dialogues among us. We have had to put ourselves together in this process. It was not possible to resist alone in the social media. And, as a result, within the field that I work, a lot of solidarity, a lot of partnership between us, amplification of our intersections. We have been more close in what concerns our resistance. Maybe not to the extent we need, but this sign is something positive in the field of resistance, even because of the demands we received: extreme violence, hunger, impoverishment, attacks. This is something that we have to intensify in the next period, valuing what, in our performance, has been positive.

In your opinion, **what are the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic** on the work of human rights advocates?

We, advocates, we are people too. So, we also suffered all the impacts: violence, unemployment (several advocates lost their jobs); **I myself had to move to another city and get a different job in the middle of the pandemic. This happened with several advocates with the extinction, downsizing of the policy, the lack of investment.** Hunger, violence, and lack of access to rights also affect LGBTIQ+ human rights advocates as a category.

In addition to what affects people in their individuality, we also have what affects the collectivity and we see the fragility of the protection network that has been eroded, emptied, both in finances and in articulation. It is a very big offensive attempting to remove rights or approve Bills and regulations that intensify violence and exclusion among our population. Human rights advocates have been hit by every negative impact that affects the poorest, most vulnerable people, and there was an increased need to face all this. **So, it is inversely proportional: we are increasingly vulnerable and having to give more constant responses because the attacks and the losses are happen on a daily basis.**

Would you have suggestions for strategies to strengthen networking **and carry out the popular protection of human rights advocates from the Covid-19 pandemic?**

We need to bring some themes to the centre of the debate. In addition to our own focus – gender, sexuality – there are some issues about the strategies that are important. First, the right to information. And access to the Internet is part of that right. **A democratic communication is essential, both in terms of content and access. This issue is central to us, otherwise we will lose.**

Thinking that access to information needs to reach everyone, that we need to take this technology to the more remote sites, we need to think about how our information technologies arrive to people. We carried out a lot of livestreams, a lot of webinars, a lot of content has been posted on social media, but we know the difficulty of access to hold a virtual meeting in Amazon. How to organize an online meeting with the riverside or quilombola people? And sometimes also with a person who is “right next door”, in an extremely precarious borough. We need to bring the debate on equitable and egalitarian access to information to people and how we are going to adapt this in a way that it does not completely replace the activities that we need for the political training and the debate to reach all the advocates for human rights.

Alike our population, which sometimes has a very short memory, we cannot forget everything we went through in this period: **the importance of solidarity, of humanity; the gains we had in terms of relationship; the losses we had (including fellow activists) for the disease itself or for the consequences of impoverishment.** We cannot forget what we have done well and its impacts on us. May our unity, approximation, similarity of agendas, strategies, not be lost when this “normality” establishes over the majority of the population. The impacts, the losses happened in a year and a half will not be easy for us to recover from; it will be required more time, more organization. May we not forget all that we went through and step-back in certain practices or stop doing others. May we bring these findings with us and may them can be translated into action.

# Valdênia Aparecida Paulino

## Justiça nos Trilhos



**My name is Valdênia Aparecida Frank, I'm 54 years old, I'm an attorney.**

As a human rights advocate, I worked for about 30 years in the Sapopemba borough, eastern São Paulo, at the "Centro de Defesa dos Direitos da Criança e do Adolescente" (Center for the defence of Children and Adolescents' Rights - CEDECA) and at the "Centro de Direitos Humanos" (Human Rights Center), advocating for life and combating the genocide of the black youth in the poor boroughs. Between 2008 and 2013, I worked as a human rights advocate and activist in the state of Paraíba, where I worked with the Potiguara and Guajajara indigenous communities, as well as with quilombola communities, and where I also worked as state Police Ombudsman. I am now in the state of Maranhão, in the city of Açailândia, Pan-Amazon region, where I work for the organization called "Justiça nos Trilhos", advocating for the communities settled along the Carajás railroad corridor, impacted by mining.



## How do you assess **the resistance effort and the confrontation of human rights violations** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

There are many elements in the actions of the advocates that are added up to the context of the pandemic. In a denialist government administration, our first struggle was to resist and fight back. **There is no passive resistance.** The advocates' resistance is an active fight: making efforts for the public authorities to be held accountable for the health system and to take action, during one of the biggest health crises we have had in the world.

The second aspect is the gender cut. With the pandemic, the impact on women has doubled because, in a sexist and patriarchal society like ours, and in a management in which the Ministry of Women reinforces this machismo, family health care responsibilities are much more attributed to women. Most women lost their jobs; many stayed at home without financial resources and still with the burden to take care of the health of their family members affected by Covid-19 and other consequences. We have had an increase in poverty and, in this context, domestic violence tends to grow, as it did.

We worked a lot in rural regions and it has been a struggle for fundamental rights, such as transportation to access hospitals. The region where I work the most is crossed by three of the

so-called BR (federal highways), with a huge truck traffic. The contamination arrived strongly and the access to the health system has not been easy, either to reach health facilities or to have adequate treatment.

**For us, advocates who work on the front line, it has not been possible to quarantine.** We took all the possible measures, but we could not leave the field because our presence was paramount for the most marginalized communities to get access to essential health care. Later on, we started a relentless seek for help because hunger hit people's homes. It has been necessary to create campaigns, to make political incidence for the authorities to take action. This intensified our work in all aspects, including the issue of self-care. It's still been a very distressing emotional period because we are dealing with deaths that, unfortunately, are not natural and could be avoided.

We had to work on several fronts during this period, **but some of the characteristics of human rights advocates are resilience, boldness and creativity. We did take those qualities at hand and used them all the time.**

## How do you assess the struggles **to carry out the promotion and achievement of human rights** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

From the beginning, defenders, organizations, ABONG, sought to articulate and create a network of material solidarity: **hygiene for prevention, providing access to the Internet to many communities, also in the area of education, in municipalities in Maranhão that are among those with the lowest HDI in the country** (the pandemic brought a significant delay in access to dignity due to the delay in education). The solidarity

networks we created were fundamental to preventing hunger at a level that could lead people to death; with transportation to access health care; access to the Internet for education; administrative and legal claims to report the prevarication of the President of the Republic. This movement was also important: to report this genocide within Brazilian institutions and in the inter-American and global human rights system.

Another movement was to support other organizations such as “A Vida por um Fio”, a campaign led by the “Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil” (National Conference of Bishops of Brazil - CNBB) together with Christian churches to take care of threatened advocates, both for prevention and for cases of direct violations. We activated Front Line Defenders, Freedom House, Justiça Global Brasil. In addition to ABONG, another partner in caring for advocates was the “Fundo Brasil de Direitos Humanos” (Brazil Human Rights Fund). We had leaders of quilombola and indigenous communities threatened and we had to activate these protection networks. What we did was to strengthen our networks, improve our communications so that we could save ourselves as a people, territory, individual lives, memory and collective. And, whenever appropriate, we try to record stories, create movements that could give a sign of life and protection to communities, as happened in Açailândia with the development of the play “Somos Todos Água” (We are All Water), which gave encouragement to youth in one of the communities most impacted by mining. The play has been virtually shared with other communities.

## In your opinion, **what are the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic** on the work of human rights advocates?

Lives of advocates got worse in terms of emotional distress and also in the performance of those who were on the front lines. For instance, advocates with co-morbidities or other health issues that would put them much more at risk.

**Those had to do their activism remotely and, of course, there is a decrease in their impact.**

We have also lost several human rights advocates to Covid and this messes with both our emotions and reduces staff on the front lines.

**We are in a region heavily impacted by mining.**

Vale, the largest mining company in Brazil, managed to get its service considered as essential by court decision. In the first half of 2021, Vale made a profit of 75 billion reais, but it owes the Brazilian government 44 billion reais, half of what it made in six months. This debt directly impacts public policies. We see people dying for lack of beds in hospitals, when these resources could supply an important part of these shortages. This billing collection could have been

made if there had been a serious government, committed to life. **So, the impact is to get tired of knocking on the doors of public authorities for their to be held accountable in enforcing these companies that only seek for profit without considering the importance of life.**

In addition, at that time when public authorities were paying attention to the pandemic, the agribusiness advanced and violations of the fundamental rights of traditional, riverside communities living in poverty increased. In the Açailândia region, the environmental impact of the ore dust, the smoke from the processing of steel plants and the excessive increase in the use of pesticides by agribusiness have been aggravating elements to the pandemic, as the main human organs affected are the lungs.

We, advocates who did not leave the front lines, are under a high level of stress and we have to be very careful because human rights violators just wait for a breach caused by our fatigue to disqualify our work. And we cannot let them to criminalize us, disqualify us, but we still need to be on this front line and even more articulated to face the violations underway in our territories and across the country.

# Would you have suggestions for strategies to strengthen networking and carry out the popular protection of human rights advocates from the Covid-19 pandemic?



To catalogue successful experiences, the models of resistance in the pandemic. **Think about self-care strategies, online self-care modalities and also, when possible, in-person.** Identifying experiences of signs of life that strengthened communities, list the main difficulties so that we can think of strategies for possible alternatives, in case we have other Covid-19 waves. We need to create kind of a “parabolic antenna” of initiatives that can both capture and disseminate experiences.

We also need to invest in training on the concept of protection, which, in addition to physical, psychological, and social self-care, involves the issue of safety. We are living in times of terror: the circulation of firearms has increased, we have stepped back on human rights issues and inequality has increased significantly. For those who are advocates, tensions have also increased and the **issue of self-care still involves feeling guilty or shamed, due to our religious culture, of being altruistic.** Often, people or organizations do not consider preventive needs into security plans and, unfortunately, only resort to a security plan when there is a threat and the attacks arrive. And we need to work with prevention, especially in the current political context and also considering the forecasted scenario to 2022. We need to be very attentive, strengthen ourselves, seek out our peers with more expertise so that we can spread this culture of protection.

I consider this document registration very important because it demonstrates a concern and care for advocates. We need to create a national fund to finance the protection of advocates. With a network of contacts, of self-care and a fund for that, we will be able to take much better care of this front line made of people and organizations working for the promotion and the advocacy for human rights.

photo: pexels

# Vanilson Torres

## Movimento Nacional da População em Situação de Rua (MNPR)



I'm Vanilson Torres, I'm from the "Movimento Nacional da População em Situação de Rua" (National Movement for the Homeless Population - MNPR) here in the state of Rio Grande do Norte.

We currently have a representative position in the National Health Council (CNS) and also in the "Câmara Técnica da Atenção Básica" (Technical Chamber of Primary Care) and in the "Comissão Intersetorial de Saúde Mental" (Intersectoral Commission on Mental Health - CISM) of the CNS. Also working in the organizing committee and coordinating the communication and mobilization committee of the 5th National Conference on Mental Health. And here in Rio Grande do Norte occupying several spaces of social control, such as the State Council for Human Rights and Citizenship, the State Council for Social Assistance, the State Drug Policy Council, the Natal's Municipal Health Council, the Torture Prevention and Combat Committee, among others.



## How do you assess **the struggle of resistance and the confrontation of human rights violations** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

The situation is very degrading, but from way before the pandemic, in relation to the homeless population, which we represent. We were already experiencing human rights violations before the pandemic, and it just came to be exposed. And there are many violations, from the denial of access to water, to the denial of access to housing. **The “fique em casa” (stay at home) slogan has arrived, but for those who are homeless, what is it like to stay at home without having a home?** So the violations are several. We have so far more than 620,000 lives loss and within these lives we have many of the homeless population. And this is very sad, because, in addition to the deaths, we noticed a huge number of people, who until then were not homeless, but, due to the financial crisis, the health crisis, are entering the homeless situation.

Furthermore, starting in 2018, we have a return to the so-called “Mapa da Fome” (Map of Hunger), of extreme poverty. We have the bone queue (those waiting for animal bones donations from meathouses), the constant food and fuel prices raise. So, all this, together with unemployment,

makes more people unable to pay their rents, their bills and, literally, start “living”, surviving, on the streets of Brazil. And this is very difficult for us, who already had a huge number of people living this reality and now we see a new wave of people coming to the streets. This further increases our responsibilities as a society, as a social movement. And this is very sad because we know that these people who are now coming to this situation, facing the street without having any knowledge of how this reality is difficult, even more when it involves children, mothers.

For us this is very challenging. But we know that this is also part of a State project, a government project: the Bolsonaro government that, in its speeches, said it has been supposed to 30,000 to be killed in the past, and he killed more than 30,000 in the present, really...**more than 620,000 people with their lives cut short, 620,000 families lost beloved ones, something that will be marked throughout their history, throughout their lives.** So, this situation is very difficult and we know that the pandemic is not over, we have variants coming and more people, unfortunately, will both lose their lives and will begin to live on the streets.

## How do you assess the fights **to carry out the promotion and achievement of human rights** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

Necessary. But it also with its drawbacks. We know that human rights advocates are criminalized. Some say “Oh, they advocate for criminals”, “Oh, they advocate for criminals, mean people”. And these human rights advocates are also threatened. And then the question remains: who takes care of the caregiver? Because, if we assess, in this context of a pandemic, health professionals are to be considered, in addition to those already customary advocates for human rights.

We joined the State Human Rights Council of Rio Grande do Norte in the 2021 election. There are many challenges for those who advocate for human rights in this country. And the human rights are somehow transversal. When we talk about human rights, some people just think that the people who make this advocacy only defend people imprisoned, people who are in juvie or similar. No, human rights are something universal, transversal, which relates to various situations. **The right to water is a human right, the right to housing is a human right. So, in all contexts we have human rights advocates.**

But we, who fight in defence of human rights, we suffer from prejudice and discrimination, whether by the television media specialized in reporting crimes, or by people who do not agree with this advocacy. This fight has its risks, its constraints, but it is worth it a lot because we know that we need to fight for something, and human rights are part of this fight for something bigger. Anyone who does not stand for human rights stands for nothing. They spend their lives, perhaps, just like a plant, because they need to be in some fight: for the homeless population, for workers. We are not here just to wander, but unfortunately many people are just touring within the social chaos we are experiencing.

### In your opinion, **what are the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the work of human rights advocates?**

The impacts are gigantic... A person who, even with a lot of effort, used to live on a poor borough for rent, suddenly experiences unemployment, hunger, going to the streets to seek for food, supplies and literally find himself/herself living on the streets... I have already experienced this reality on the streets and it reflects on us who are at the forefront of this fight. **We have an increase in this population on the streets, more people looking for services, looking for food.** We have more challenges, but every day we have fewer mechanisms to face this social inequality. Perhaps what we are doing is too little. Maybe the advocacy is a little fragile, even with all the will to do it. Before the pandemic, we already had technological difficulties due to not having commercial plans for Internet data transfer, cell phones. The pandemic brought the technological need, to work remotely, but we did not have – and still do not have – mechanisms to participate in remote activities that depend on the Internet, cell phone mobile data and financial resources to all this. This has been very difficult for the MNPR, but even so, we did our best to be engaged with this context and we also did not leave the streets. The emergency aid, when it was launched, had the technological issue as the core one, and homeless population not already registered in the program Bolsa Família, could not be included in the new program because of its top to bottom design. This is just a sample of the technological exclusion of this population, but it also brings the bigger picture of social exclusion we experience.

### **Would you have suggestions for strategies to strengthen networking and carry out the popular protection of human rights advocates from the Covid-19 pandemic?**

This reminds me of a very beautiful phrase that has been said before the pandemic: “Ninguém solta a mão de ninguém” (No one let go of anyone’s hand). It’s very beautiful! But are we taking people’s hands? Or rather, before saying that no one lets go, it is necessary to take people’s hands. Are we taking the hands of the street population, LGBTIQAP+, indigenous peoples, the black population, from the poor boroughs? Taking people’s hands is to be sided with them, committed and focusing on the needs of these populations. But, we see that it is more like “cada um no seu quadrado” (a phrase from a famous song that is literally “each one in their own square).

I wouldn’t be able to say at the moment what are the right strategies, because we are in a whirlwind of situations that often don’t even allow us to develop a thought. However, **it is important to have training support within the theme of human rights defenders for the so-called “PopRua” Movement (MNPR), for other movements, collectives, and even for people who are not in any collective.** That wouldn’t be the only way. This can be built within a widened meeting with everyone involved.

The pandemic brought the disaster of deaths, but it also brought many teachings and one of them is if you are not a millionaire, don’t have a home of your own, if you are a small businessperson and/or depend on a monthly wage, in the payroll of some person you call boss, you are not so far from the homeless situation. Many of us, when we see someone on the streets, we judge them from where we are standing, because of our prejudice and also because of what the media says, that whoever is on the street is a criminal, a marginal. May we reflect that those who are on the streets are part of the working class, people with life stories, who have had their human rights violated, historically, and the consequence of this is the homeless situation. I lived for 27 years on the streets of Natal. Whenever possible I read a lot and this gave me a critical sense of my reality. **And, in the movement, we use art and culture as a form of resistance as well, as a safeguard for human rights.**

# Virgínia Berriel

## Central Única dos Trabalhadores (CUT)



**I'm Virginia Berriel, trade unionist, journalist.**

I am currently with the "Conselho Nacional dos Direitos Humanos" (National Council of Human Rights - CNDH) representing the Central Única dos Trabalhadores (Workers Unified Hub - CUT), but I have been in this activism since 2013 because I am part of the "Movimento Humanos Direitos", which is made by artists, intellectuals, priests; I've been there since its beginning. I also worked here in Rio de Janeiro in the "Comissão Popular da Verdade" (Popular Truth Commission), which brings together some trade union hubs and movements on account of the atrocities of police violence in the city of Rio de Janeiro. We got a lot of attention to us with this Popular Truth Commission. We received Danny Glover, UN ambassador, to go to the Rocinha "favela" (slum), we were welcomed with gunshots. We received Pérez Esquivel, Nobel Peace Prize, right at the time of Marielle's murder, we went to the community called Maré with him, then we took him to the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (at Moncorvo Filho Street). We had a lot of problems with the Popular Truth Commission, then we had to extinguish it, between 2017 and 2018, because of not only hidden threats, but because we started to be followed in the streets, to our doors. I continued to work with the Popular Truth Commission, now I am in the National Council for Human Rights and the fight goes on.

In view of the political scenario we are going through, we have a very high degree of vulnerability, I already feel this with the CNDH. We advocates, completely unprotected. The CNDH is linked to the Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights and within its structures we receive lots of reprimands, we know how this government operates. But I will never stop working, I will never stop going on a mission, I will never stop doing what has to be done. And also for the other movement, "Humanos Direitos", we have also made many efforts. It is extremely delicate acting, very dangerous. CUT always gives us many guidelines on how to proceed. But, even with all this care, I feel vulnerable, as if people were looking at what I post on my social networks and people writes down: "look, you can't post this, you all have to die".

It is a very bad situation for us, but it makes us keep fighting because there are many unprotected people and in a much greater degree of vulnerability than ours. And we assumed this role, it's part of what we choose: whoever advocates for the rights of workers, also do it for the rights of the vulnerable, the unprotected, those who are hungry. This is a job of enormous dignity and that is why I embraced the cause from a very young age: I was already acting like an activist even without being aware of an activist in the 1980s in the small town of Florida Paulista, in the countryside of the state of São Paulo.



How do you assess **the struggle of resistance and the confrontation of human rights violations** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

I think it's the worst moment, the most difficult, the most challenging. This period of the pandemic, especially for the activists, has been challenging because, at the same time, everyone would like to be on the front lines fighting, but many were reasonably concerned and did not go. CUT's guidance was that we should stay at home, quarantine. I was reprimanded several times because I didn't stop. I visited call centre companies and, in most of them, many people worked in a big hall, without the proper distancing, without hand sanitizer. We received several reports from workers who were feeling abandoned by companies and very afraid of getting contaminated.

We follow the situation of the Haitians who occupied the bridge in Assis Brasil (Acre), the Venezuelan indigenous people in Boa Vista, people without face masks, without the necessary distancing and preventive care. **And it is our duty to report what is happening.**

Covid has not gone away and there is a much more resistant flu and we have to work, we have to defend people, advocate for the human rights being violated more than at any other time in our history: the rights of indigenous, riverside/quilombolas, teachers (Minister Damares reported teachers in Rio de Janeiro for being "preaching communism" in their classes). And it is the government itself, all its staff, attacking. We are not within the government, but we are in this State that persecutes teachers, journalists, women, the poor, and also human rights advocates. That's why this is the most challenging period for all of us, but it also gives us the courage to keep going.

How do you assess the fights **to carry out the promotion and achievement of human rights** in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

We are in a challenging context. We fight by looking or trying to look at all the possibilities we have. **That's why we want to transform the CNDH into an independent National Institution, as it exists in other countries, so that it has its own budget, not depending on the government.** Recently, the CNDH's communication sector had to evaluate a government recommendation on the position of national congressman Daniel Silveira, in lawsuits against the Federal Supreme Court (STF), in the sense of considering it as a "defence of freedom of speech". Freedom of speech to offend? To affirm that the Ministers have to do as he says? Today we have people who represent the government within the CNDH, and we are being much more monitored and the government wants us to turn a blind eye to their arbitrary acts.

We are walking on the edge, but even so, we don't stop working, we don't stop defending what we think is right. In 2021, we had many challenges. To create resolutions, recommendations, public notes, we had to help each other a lot, our institutions, with the support of our advisors, of our legal department as well. We know that the challenge of the year 2022 will be greater because it is an election year and the government, the Ministry's advisors, have show their real faces and as long as this situation prevails, we know there is a huge fight ahead, but we will fight it wisely.

## In your opinion, **what are the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic** on the work of human rights advocates?

The great hinders were the online meetings. The timing of the in-person meetings are different from the virtual ones: there is always something to be addressed or to be reviewed. **It is extremely tiring, especially with several entities together.** The Internet didn't help us much either. We are entering the 5G era, but 4G has not been consolidated yet and it has many limitations.

I'm with the CNDH's Committee on Work, Education and Social Security and the biggest challenge we all had was seeing that most students in public and technical schools in this country did not have normal remote classes. They spent the year 2020 without classes, many only with a handout, many with precarious studying conditions at home, without a cell phone, without having access to the Internet. We human rights advocates raised the issue about the Internet. We found that, when privatization began in 1998, there was an agreement with the Ministry of Communications stating that by 2010 telephone companies would be obliged to install free Internet in all urban public schools in the country. They signed this agreement, but the government did not enforce it and just let it alone. We did a research in some public schools and 90% of urban schools do not have Internet; many principals and teachers used to pay for the service with their own money. How to work platforms during a pandemic that got us all of a sudden? **Much of the 2021 school dropout is a result of that** and not because the teachers didn't fight, they ignored it.

We had to map these issues and see that the government failed. We presented a Bill to oblige phone operators to install Internet for poor young people, for young people in public schools. The Bill passed, but it has been put to soak, in this government in which we managed to take ten steps forward and twenty steps backwards. This was a challenge, the teachers have been giants in this process and they are being massacred to this very day by the government that sometimes reports a school, a university, sometimes persecutes a teacher.

The CNDH had to deal with several Commissions, received several complaints. What keeps us firm is the will to help, to be representing, and the resistance. Because the union leader, the activist, the human rights advocate is made up of a different matter: they have already been beaten so much that their skin is thicker. We have already learned to deal with weaknesses, we are kind of aware of them. And it is resistance that is helping us and will keep us going in 2022, which I estimate will be the most extreme period for human rights advocates. The pandemic has generated new people, I think we will come out of this process refreshed, much wiser. We lost a lot of people, there is no doubt, the marks will never be erased, but we will never be who we were in 2019.

## **Would you have suggestions for strategies to strengthen networking** and carry out the popular protection of human rights advocates from the **Covid-19 pandemic?**

This report will be publicized and this publicly exposes the guts of what we have experienced in these two years. It doesn't take us out of a dangerous situation, but it makes us a little more protected. The institutions that are in the network, whether Abong, civil society organizations or UN institutions, are the ones that are providing coverage for us. I followed the attacks on Márcia Tiburi, the attacks that we all are suffering, not only the advocates, but the workers in Brazil, the attacks mainly on the trade union leaders of the mixed-capital companies, state-run companies, the workers fired, directors who had their rights removed down here in Rio de Janeiro.

Faced with these situations, we advocates must have further protection. We have these institutions in a network above our heads and they are there looking at the violations and the work we are doing and who have to support us, whether here in Brazil or abroad. **Today, we feel as if Brazil has lost, it is dead, but this encourages us to do more.** The year 2022 will be difficult because the pandemic is not over, the variants are there, there will be elections. But we have a safeguard that is you, the international organizations, the human rights organizations, our own entities, the CUT, our trade unions. It is resistance that will make us giants in 2022.



# Human rights or unlawful humans?

**December 10, 1948, on a Friday.**

Human rights are declared in the face of the atrocities of wars.

The world features this legacy

The European invasion of Brazil taking our lives and wealth  
Of native and indigenous peoples, protectors, defenders of nature

Human rights violations already existed at that time.

Portugal tried to enslave the indigenous

There were many fights and resistances and other peoples went to look  
for them overseas, I am speak of Africa, of the black population

Who was free in their original nations

and has been brought through slave ships

Nowadays, in Brazil, the ships are the prisons

May 13, 1888

Princess Isabel signs the so-called Golden Act, the Liberation Act,  
but what liberation?

If the former have been thrown in Rua do Império  
(Império Boulevard), without home, land, and food

Enslavement in our current Brazil did not end

Look at the minimum wage! Don't try to attenuate!

Whether a PopRua or PopNegra member, and entering a shopping mall or  
a supermarket and there will always be a surveillance camera on you

I'm with the PopRua movement in Brazil

Where 67% of its population is black

It is a reflection of historical processes

Cursed inheritance of this enslavement

The genocidal and fascist bolsovirus (mix of Bolsonaro and Virus) talking  
about the quilombola, our siblings:

Bolsonaro said the lightest among the quilombola

he visited weighed 7@ (@ is a unit of measure to weight animal meat) and  
even him would not be good to reproduce (breeding)

Such a crook! Destroying lives, ethnicities and the whole nation

End of the employment stability for the worker class and end of Program

Bolsa Família. The federal government exalts weapons possession, feeds  
corruption, the "family" use the bible protection and shield: "you will know the

truth, and the truth will make you free".

Whitewashed tomb! Breed of vipers!

They open the mouth. And lies start to come out.

The Covid-19 pandemic exposes and highlights human and social inequalities

Rising hunger, and the prices of electric energy and gasoline

Increase in the homeless population

Increase in the price of gas

In times of war, fighting is necessary

It is very important to be in the fight with you.

In the fight against setbacks in Brazil

We have to fight, resist, dare and win.

**Vanilson Torres**

"Movimento Nacional da População em  
Situação de Rua"

(National Movement of the  
Homeless Population - MNPR)





# Projeto Sementes de Proteção (Project Seeds of Protection)

The Project “Sementes de Proteção de Defensores/as de Direitos Humanos” (Project Human Rights Defenders Protection Seeds) is a joint initiative to work with human rights advocates. Its general goal is to “contribute to the support of human rights advocates and civil society organizations that work on issues associated with human rights violations and attacks against fundamental freedoms in Brazil”. The specific goal is to “**strengthen the capacities of defence, promotion and protection for the rights of human rights advocates of social movements and civil society organizations in 21 states of the five Brazilian regions**”.

The Maranhense Society of Human Rights (**SMDH/MNDH**), the Brazilian Association of Non-Governmental Organizations (**Abong**) and **We World GVC Onlus** are the proponents of the project, presented through public notice and approved by the European Union Delegation in Brazil and started in March 2021, with an extension of its development for 36 months. The Project also has the participation, as associates, of the “Movimento Nacional de Direitos Humanos” (**MNDH**), “Comissão Pastoral da Terra” (**CPT**), “Associação Brasileira de Gays, Lésbicas, Bissexuais, Travestis, Transexuais e Intersexos” (**ABGLT**), “Articulação para o Monitoramento dos Direitos Humanos (**AMDH**)” and “Conselho Indigenista Missionário” (**CIMI**).

In its implementation, entities affiliated to the MNDH are also participants, as “**Organizações Referenciais no Território**” (Referential Organizations in the Territory), which are: MA: “Centro de Defesa dos Direitos da Criança e do Adolescente” with Father Marcos Passerini (CDMP); AC: “Centro de Defesa dos Direitos Humanos e Educação Popular” (CDDHEP); PA: “Centro de Estudos e Defesa do Negro do Pará” (Cedenpa); PI: “Centro de Defesa dos Direitos Humanos Nenzinha Machado” (CDDHNM); CE: “Centro de Defesa dos Direitos Humanos Antônio Conselheiro” (CDDH-AC); RN: “Centro de Direitos Humanos e Memória Popular” (CDHMP); PE: “Centro Dom Helder Câmara de Estudos e Ação Social” (CENDHEC); PB: “Fundação de Defesa dos Direitos Humanos Margarida Maria Alves” (FDDHMMA); BA: “Grupo Tortura Nunca Mais da Bahia” (GTNM-BA); SE: “Instituto Braços” – (IB); TO: “Movimento Estadual de Direitos Humanos do Tocantins” (MEDH); GO: “Instituto Brasil Central” (Ibrace); MT: “Centro de Direitos Humanos Dom Máximo Biennes” (CDH Cáceres); MS: “Comissão Regional de Justiça e Paz” (CJP-MS); SP: “Centro de Direitos Humanos e Educação Popular” (CDHEP); RJ:

“Organização de Direitos Humanos Projeto Legal” (Projeto Legal); MG: “Instituto Direitos Humanos: Promoção, Pesquisa e Intervenção em Direitos Humanos e Cidadania” (IDH); ES: “Centro de Defesa dos Direitos Humanos da Serra” (CDDH Serra); RS: “Comissão de Direitos Humanos de Passo Fundo” (CDHPF); SC: “Centro de Direitos Humanos Maria da Graça Braz” (CDH Joinville) e PR: “Centro de Direitos Humanos de Londrina” (CDH Londrina). The organizations of the Project’s final beneficiaries will also be partners throughout the process.

They are understood as final beneficiaries: activists, fighters of the people, community leaders, leaders who carry out social struggle in Brazil and are recognized as advocates for human rights because they work daily to guarantee and enforce rights in the civil society organizations and popular social movements; they are rural workers (landless, rural workers, family farmers, squatters); traditional peoples and communities (indigenous, quilombolas, riverside people, artisanal fishermen, rubber tappers, extractivists); women; LGBTIQ+; environmentalists; leaders of the anti-racist struggle, homeless; affected by large endeavours (mining, dams); religious of African-Brazilian rites; agents in the fight against torture and incarceration; youth advocates from the urban poor boroughs; homeless people and material collectors; popular communicators; urban poor borough leaders.

### **The Project foresees three levels of action:**

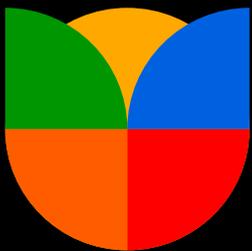
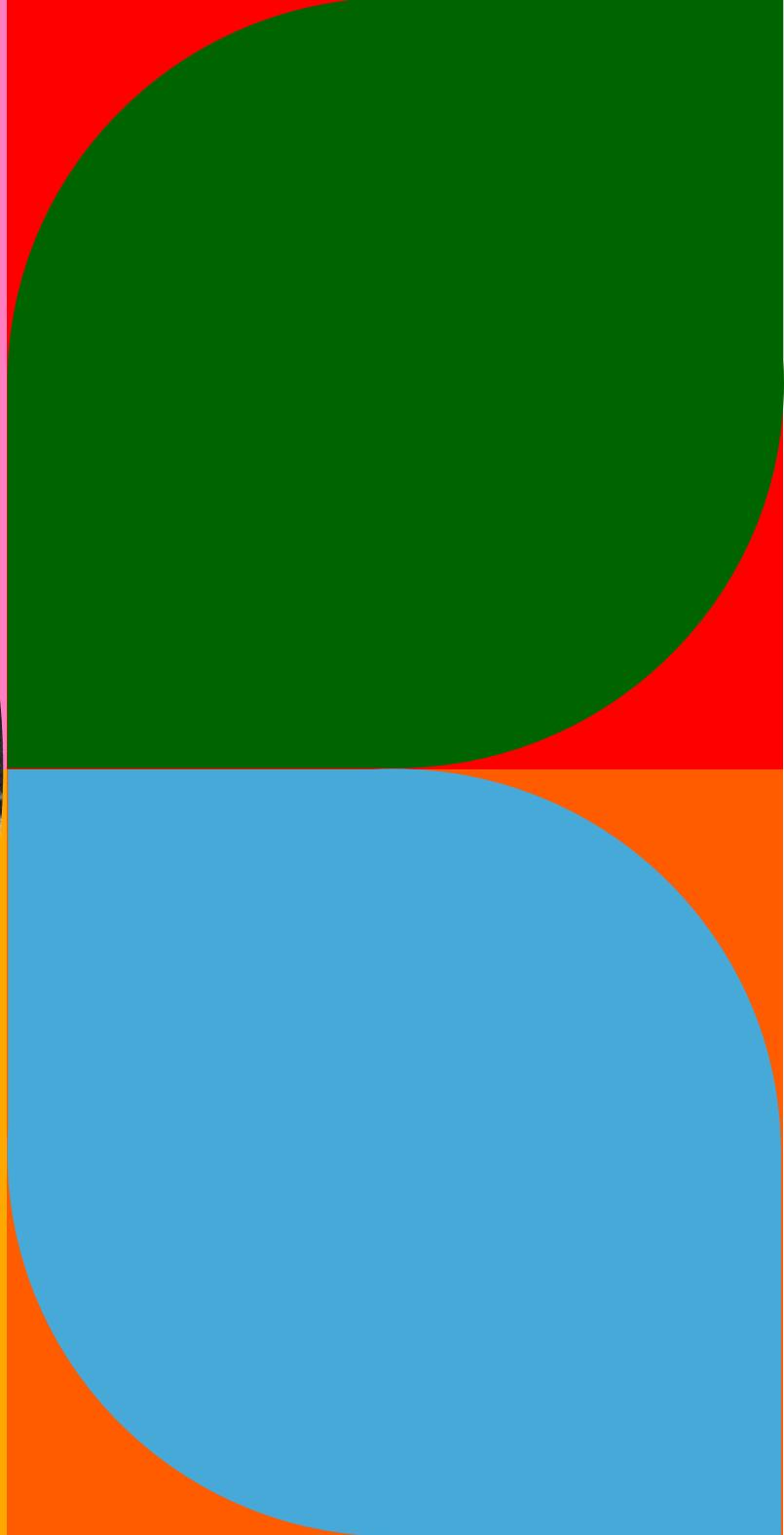
- 1.** Direct Action: carried out in the territories and by the organizations that participate in the Project and work in it (whether national or local) through training activities, articulation of network actions, reception, monitoring and referral of situations that need protection, systematization of information and knowledge, social mobilization, communication and political advocacy to face situations of risk and threat and to promote the work of human rights advocates;
- 2.** Complementary Action: carried out in the territories and at the national and international level by the work of the National Project Team together with the organizations that work in the territory for the development of activities of national incidence with the National Human Rights Council, the Human Rights Commissions of the Chamber and Senate, the Public Protection Programs and the Justice system and its agents; and international advocacy with the United Nations system (UN) and the Organization of American States (OAS), the European Union (Commission and Parliament) and also with international civil society;
- 3.** Supplementary Action: carried out by the National Team with the support of organizations operating in the territory basically to promote communication actions (national campaign and other initiatives), for the production of knowledge and information, with the publication of National Reports on the situation of defenders of human rights and two surveys, one on the perception of human rights defenders and the other on the impact of large projects and private capital (companies) in the production of risks and threats to human rights defenders.

The Project maintains a Direct Support Fund, that is, a support line that decentralizes resources so that Referential Organizations in the Territory can subsidize the development of direct actions provided for in the Project. The Fund will also receive requests for emergency support to meet the protection needs of advocates (individuals and organizations) upon submission of an application through participating organizations or Project partners.

The implementation of the Project is carried out by a National Team formed by a group of activists and professionals hired by SMDH, Abong and WWB. The strategic coordination of the Project is carried out by the National Coordination, which meets monthly and in which the applicants SMDH/ MNDH, Abong and WWB participate. The most strategic debates are carried out by the Expanded National Coordination, in which the applicants (SMDH/ MNDH, Abong, WWB) and associates (CPT, ABGLT, AMDH, MNDH and CIMI) participate.

The “Project Sementes” is developed in partnership with the Project “Defendendo Vidas”, implemented by SMDH and partnerships, with support from Misereor. Thus, together and as a complement, the operation reaches all the Brazilian states.

More information:  
**[sementesdeprotecao.org.br](http://sementesdeprotecao.org.br)**



project  
**seeds  
of protection**  
for human rights advocates

proponenti



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