



CHICO MENDES - 30TH ANNIVERSARY

A MEMORY TO HONOR. A LEGACY TO STAND UP FOR.

XAPURI LETTER

Dear Chico,

This week, on December 15-17th, we – over 500 people from all over Acre, the Amazon, Brazil and the planet – gathered in your town of Xapuri, Acre, to honor his memory and stand up for your legacy, in the 30th anniversary of your passing away from this world.

We missed you a lot and had very fond memories of you, Chico! Here were your fellow rubber tappers and your fellow members in the human barricades known as *empates*; from afar came representatives from extractive communities from all Brazilian biomes; there were friends from outside the forest, from Brazil and abroad; there were people who met you, and also many people who never met you and were moved by the strength of your vision.

For three days we reflected seriously on the meaning of your wise speech that immortalized your strategic vision of the future of our planet: “At first, I thought I was fighting to save the rubber trees; then I thought my struggle was to save the Amazon rainforest; now, I realize that I am fighting to save humankind.” Certainly, Chico! Your struggle’s gone beyond... far beyond yourself.

You are the one to make it happen, Chico, in these times of scarce flights and frequent rains in the Amazon, this profound dialogue of ours, which, out of your inspiration, drives us to continue fighting for a sustainable development approach that will free us from the woes of environmental degradation and contamination of the water, soil and the air we breathe. You are the one to keep us fighting for a fairer, more supportive and more egalitarian society, for this alternative world that we believe is still possible!

You are the one, Chico, to encourage us to continue dreaming in the face of the setbacks announced as part of the initial decisions of an elected government that even before taking office has been able to deprive Brazil from the right to host the next Climate Conference, has now declared war on trade unions, civil society organizations, social movements, rights bestowed on the youth, women, indigenous peoples, *quilombola* communities, riparian communities, extractive communities, forest-dwelling peoples, and all the traditional populations in Brazil.

And since we mentioned the youth, Chico, you should be happy with the decision that your fellow CNS members made to make of this Meeting an opportunity to share knowledge and for generational transference. Just as you dreamed one day, more than half the people here are young. These are youngsters who came here to make a commitment to stand up for your legacy for the next 30 years!

Unfortunately “the memory of a sad past of pain, sorrow and death,” included by yourself in your time capsule message to the young people of the future to be opened on September 6th,

2120, is a source of continued sorrow in our time. The figures are alarming, comrade Chico: every five days one of your – and our – fellow activists is murdered in Brazil.

In 2017 alone, more than a thousand conflicts related to land, water or labor issues in the fields and forests of our country were reported. Over the past 12 months, there have been at least 70 killings. The latest victim of these killings was Gilson Maria Temponi, in Placas, Pará. Can you imagine Chico, another killing right when we were gathered here to honor your memory, in the 30th anniversary of your assassination, in the back door of your house, on December 22nd, 1988, by the treacherous bullets of a shotgun fired at the behest of large land owners.

But not everything is sorrow! We are here to celebrate your legacy with great joy. The struggle of your fellow activists has transformed the Extractive Reserves! That proposal for shared and collective use of the forest areas by the extractive populations that you put forward during the First National Meeting of Rubber Tappers, held in 1985 in Brasilia, grew into a public policy covering not only in the Amazon, but also other Brazilian biomes.

There are now thousands of families living on millions of hectares of protected areas. And in these areas, although much is yet to be achieved, in addition to extractive production there are now schools, health facilities, electricity, and in many cases even the Internet! But now, Comrade Chico, the newly elected governments and parliament are threatening to give away the land under our care, which ensure our economy and way of life are sustainable, to the agribusiness, logging and mining companies. They overlook the fact that the environmental services we provide benefit not only ourselves, but all the peoples around the world.

We truly hope, comrade Chico, that the achievements of your legacy, of our resistance over the past three decades, of the alliances that you so generously built with the most diverse partners in and out of the forest, will touch the hearts and minds of those who are coming to power so that they continue to respect and collaborate with our forest peoples, in defense of our territories, environmental conservation and the social rights of the Brazilian people.

We hope, Chico, that right here on the banks of the Acre River, in your beloved town of Xapuri, in the heart of the Amazon rainforest, the youth in the year 2120 can be gathered in an auspicious Chico Mendes Week to celebrate the strength of the struggle we are waging together with our people, the woods, the hinterlands, the sea, the rivers, and the forests; to celebrate the unity of all peoples around the vision you have bequeathed us and the planetary revolution that you did not have the time to witness, but which you had the pleasure of dreaming of.

WE WILL NOT QUIT STANDING UP FOR THE PEOPLES OF
THE FOREST! WE WILL NOT GIVE UP THE LEGACY
OF CHICO MENDES! WE WILL NOT LET GO OF EACH
OTHER'S HANDS!

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