



## Open Letter to Pope Francis

### Humanity Depends on Land, Water, Housing and Work

To His Holiness  
**Pope Francis**

The Single Confederation of Workers and Workers (CUT) and The National Confederation of Rural Workers and Family Farmers (CONTAG), together with other international union entities, considering the relevance of Your leadership and the importance of the Catholic Church in the world, they present a brief report on the rural life, the production and the quality of life of our habitants. Brazil needs your support and the voice of the Church.

Brazil is the largest bovine, poultry and grain producer in the world, maintaining a historical rural development model that prioritizes agribusiness for exportation. The consequence is the continuous and ever growing concentration of land, goods and incomes, that has been intensified in the current illegitimate government of President Michel Temer. His presidency is trying to impose a model of terror and violence against the peoples of the countryside, the forest and the waters, indigenous, quilombolas, traditional communities, the working class and the deprived population, specially by the approval of the considerable reduction, for the next 20 years, of the budget to public policies for these groups, to ensure the remuneration of capital and the consequent transferring of public assets to the private sector.

The seizure of power by the illegitimate government imposes the agenda of current capitalism, and that means great setbacks in historical achievements of the Brazilian working class, which came from the social struggles throughout the years. The illegitimate government's close alliance with the conservative forces of the legislative power, the judiciary power, the agribusiness sector of the Brazilian Parliament and the media comes, every day, withdrawing the rights of the working class, and promoting the dismantling of the State structures that were at the service of the people. The ultra-liberal reforms and the delivery of common goods to the international market put in risk the lives of our populations.

Among the most harmful measures is one that aims to deliver land, water and public assets to national and foreign capital. It also requires special attention the way national and international companies exploit mining, whether in land, forests and water. Mining in Brazil is as predatory as agribusiness. The expulsion of people from their lands, waters and forests increases the situation of people living in precarious conditions in cities, the destruction of fauna and flora, underemployment, violence and hunger. Brazil has defeated hunger, and now it is frightening our people again, drawing attention even from international organizations.

The State crimes, practiced by security agents belonging to the cadres of military and civilian police, and their consequent impunity – legalized by Temer's Government – as well as the criminalization of social movements and the permanent violations of fundamental rights, are living examples of this complicity. This scenario has allowed a kind of "permission to kill" where the agribusiness sector of the Brazilian Parliament and the most conservative sectors of urban entrepreneurship impose a wave of persecutions, prisons and murders of attacks on rights, through violence and the adoption of harmful measures to the Brazilian people by the illegitimate government. For example: the use of the Parliamentary Inquiry Commission that investigated the National Indigenous Foundation and the National Institute of

Colonization and Agrarian Reform to criminalize the victims, the human rights defenders and social and trade union movements, including members of the clergy that defend the rights of the landsman on the countryside and the entire working class. We cannot forget the norm published by Temer's Government which alters the definitions of slave labor and prevents the State from exercising oversight and punishment. (Portaria No. 1.129 of October 13, 2017, Ministry of Labor).

The expansion of the agricultural frontier in Brazil is being held specially in the Amazon and in the Cerrado biomes, where the commodity strategies of agriculture and the commodification of common goods (land, water and subsoil) move with greater vigor. This movement is linked to a model of capital accumulation that favors the implementation of agricultural megaprojects and is based on the dependence on state donations, the intensive use of poison, the precariousness of work and violent mechanisms of expropriation of lands and territories, causing serious social and environmental conflicts. In 2016, 1.536 conflicts over land and 172 over water were registered involving almost one million people, according to data from the Pastoral Land Commission and the NGO Global Witness. The data on human rights violations, murders, prisons and destruction of homes and plantations are also increasing considerably.

That scenario tends to reduce access to water as a common good and expand the concentration of land, a model that has been strengthened in Brazil for more than five centuries. In our country, only 2% of the holders of rural properties accumulate 47% of the land registered in the country. On the other hand, 91% of the rural properties linked to family farming hold just 29% of the total area.

We are immensely concerned that this situation will be further deepened by so many social setbacks sponsored by neoliberalism. These setbacks tend to increase the pressure on the working class as a whole, with the intention of commercializing all the spheres of life. The result of the current capitalist agenda in Brazil is hard on rural and urban workers.

We will stand strong in the fight for land, water, housing and work. We work for the dignity of the human being and for the preservation of the natural resources. We have the "(...) conviction that we and all the beings of the universe, created by our Father, are united by ties invisible and we form a kind of universal family, a sublime communion that impels us to a sacred, loving and humble respect " (*Laudato Si*, No. 89).

In the past, we answered to a summoning that said: "You all who heard the appeal of the peoples in distress, you who insisted on answering them, you are the apostles of good and true development, which does not consist in the selfish and loved wealth of itself, but in the economy at the service to man, in the daily bread distributed to all as a source of brotherhood and a sign of Providence " (*Populorum Progressio*, No. 86).

Our trade union and popular entities are at Your Holiness service to sum our efforts to preserve nature, ensure food for all, as well as decent conditions of housing and work, public policies and guidance to prepare fully prepared citizens to exercise Democracy and Freedom.


São Paulo, Brazil. November 23, 2017.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Wagner Freitas".

**Wagner Freitas**  
Presidente da CUT

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Carmen Helena Ferreira Foro".

**Carmen Helena Ferreira Foro**  
Vice-Presidenta da CUT

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Aristides Veras dos Santos".

**Aristides Veras dos Santos**  
Presidente da CONTAG