

## BRAZIL

### Protest against Hydroelectric Dam of Belo Monte

In concluding in 2007 a year of worldwide activities around the theme of “Cultural Landscapes and Monuments of Nature” an ICOMOS meeting in Manaus, Brazil in November 2007 declared the tropical rainforest of the Amazon region as the first International Monument of Nature:

*Being aware of the ecological threat to our planet and taking into account the protective measures already implemented or planned by the peoples and governments of the concerned countries;*

*Appealing to the responsibility of all people and countries benefiting directly or indirectly from the largest continuous forest area on earth;*

*Especially in honour of the traditional populations that interact with the rainforests resources on the basis of a sustainable development since thousands of years;*

*ICOMOS declares MONUMENT OF NATURE the tropical rainforest of the Amazon region in its natural boundaries and in its integrity.*

(Manaus, 17 November 2007; see H@R 2006/07, p. 40 f.)

The term *monument of nature* which can also be found in many nature conservation laws was originally coined by the famous explorer Alexander von Humboldt. When travelling in the Amazonian forest about 200 years ago, everything there reminded Humboldt of “the primordial state of the earth”. Nowadays, while more and more deforested and burnt areas of the rainforest lead to the displacement of the indigenous peoples, to the destruction of their culture and to the disappearance of countless animal and plant species, the questions about the future of this unique ecological system have to be raised again and again: After all, the largest imaginable “Monument of Nature” is not only a matter of natural heritage; it is also a matter of cultural heritage at risk.

At present, one of the most serious threats to the tropical rainforest is the gigantic hydroelectric dam project of Belo Monte in the northern state of Pará, started by the former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva at the end of his term of office in 2010 by signing the concession. The current plans for this dam project were worked out by his recently elected successor in office, Dilma Rousseff, former Minister of Mines and Energy. The eleven-billion-dollar project has been planned for more than 35 years, but had not been realised so far due to worldwide protests. In spite of the fierce opposition of the Kayapo and other indigenous peoples the project is now to be implemented by any means possible, especially since the government recently lifted a ban by a court in the state of Pará to invite tenders. The court had considered it to be evident that the environmental impact statement required by the Constitution was insufficient and that the dam project would threaten the living space of the indigenous peoples. The hydroelectric dam of Belo Monte in the middle of the Amazon region, which is supposed to start operating in 2015, would become the world’s third largest dam after Haipú near the border to Paraguay and the Three Gorges Dam in China (see H@R 2006/2007, p. 46). The Rio Xingu, a branch of the Amazon, is one

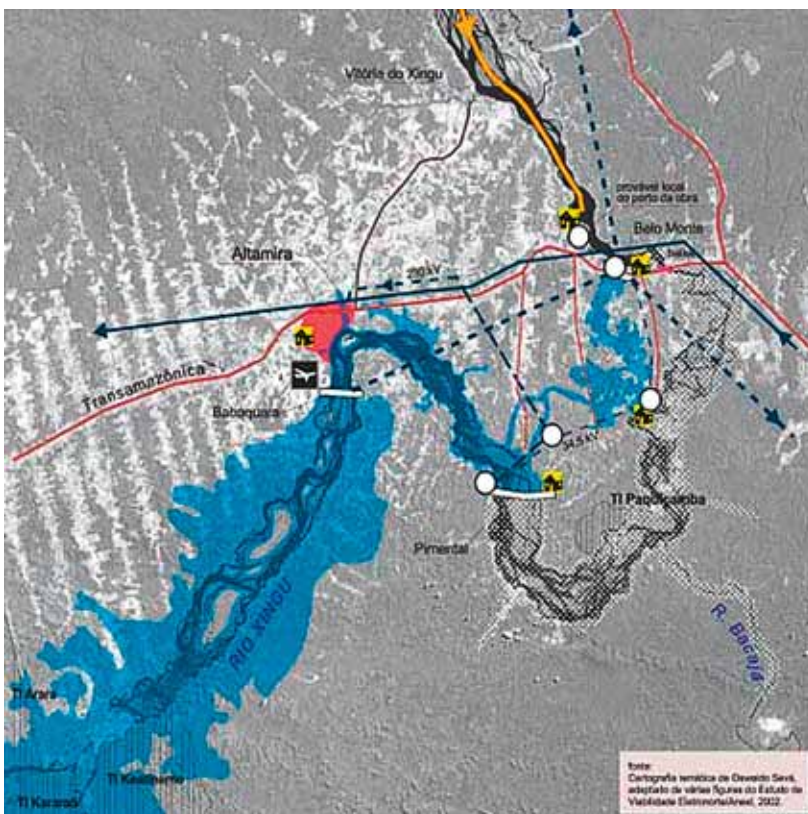
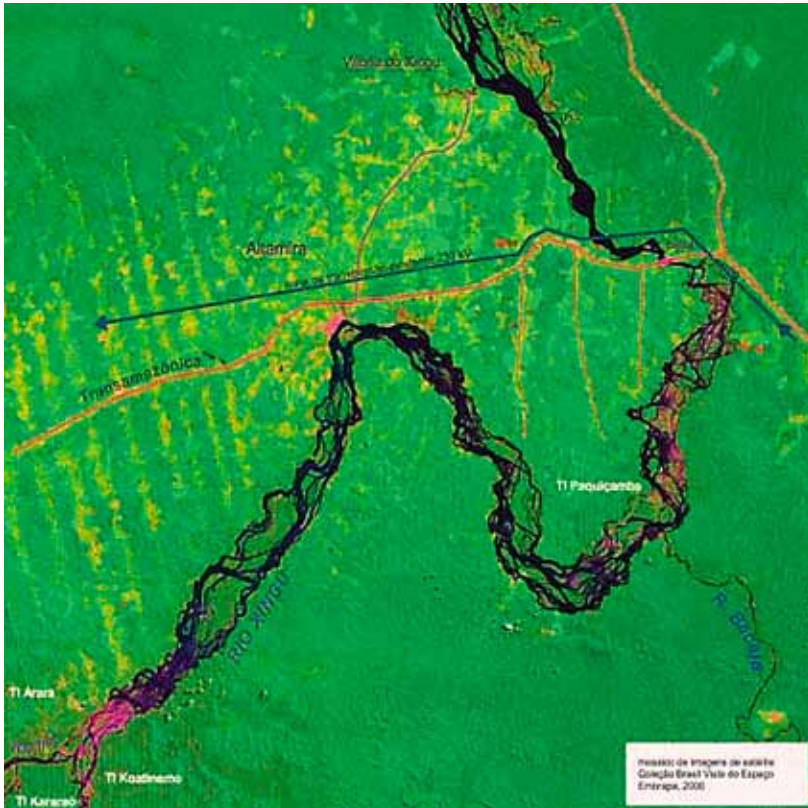
Indigenous people protesting against the dam project at Rio Xingu



of the most speciose rivers worldwide with four times as many species of fish as in all of Europe. Furthermore, it is also the living space of a dozen of indigenous peoples in the rainforest. The Belo Monte project plans to dam up 40 km of the river by erecting several dams. This would lead to the flooding of 500 km<sup>2</sup> of rainforest and of parts of the town of Altamira. In addition, c. 20 000 inhabit-

ants in the districts of Altamira, Vitória do Xingu and Brasil Novo would have to be resettled.

Michael Petzet



The Belo Monte dam project