



LETTER FROM THE NATIONAL CAMPAIGN IN DEFENCE OF THE CERRADO TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT



The **National Campaign in Defence of the Cerrado**, composed of 56 social movements and organizations and indigenous, quilombola and traditional communities, would like to address a few words to the European Parliament at this crucial time in the discussion on the Proposal for a regulation on deforestation-free products. This proposal could have concrete impacts on Brazil and future generations.

Since our Campaign began in 2016, we have affirmed the importance of the Cerrado and its peoples for the protection of the socio-biodiversity of the planet. We have also denounced the increase in violence in rural areas, land grabbing, rampant deforestation, the failure to grant land titles to indigenous, quilombola and traditional communities for their territories, as well as the loss of biodiversity and the abusive use and pollution of water, especially by sectors of the agribusiness industry. It should be noted that the use of 73.5% of all agrochemicals consumed



in Brazil is concentrated in the Cerrado biome. This includes the widespread use of a massive amount of pesticides that are banned in Europe¹.

The Cerrado is known as the **birthplace of waters**, as it sustains twelve hydrographic basins, including some of the most important ones in the country. The Paraguay River and its feeder rivers, such as the Cuiabá, São Lourenço and Taquari Rivers, are born in the Cerrado, as are the Paraná, Paranaíba, São Francisco, Doce, Jequitinhonha and Itapecuru Rivers. The Cerrado is also the place of origin of several rivers that feed into the righthand side of the Amazon basin, such as the Tocantins, Araguaia, Tapajós and Xingu Rivers and several tributaries of the Madeira River. These feeder rivers are even responsible for regulating and maintaining the flow of the Amazon River. The extinction of the Cerrado would thus mean the extinction of the birthplace of these waters, which would affect other ecological regions, including the Amazon itself.

Despite its ecological importance, the Cerrado is suffering in agony from the expansion of the agricultural frontier and the conversion of thousands of square kilometres of native vegetation every year into pastureland or plantations of soy and other grains produced for export. In only 50 years, half of its original plant cover has been destroyed at a speed and a scale greater than that of the Atlantic Forest and the Amazon, as shown by data from INPE/PRODES², the Brazilian institute that monitors the deforestation of the Cerrado and the Amazon via satellite.

Even though the structural and historical roots of this process lie in choices made by companies and governments in the past, it has increased significantly under the Jair Bolsonaro administration. Between 2020 and 2021 alone, the deforested area grew by 20%, according to data from MapBiomas³, mostly in the region known as Matopiba, which is made up of portions of the Cerrado of the states of Maranhão, Tocantins, Piauí and Bahia⁴.

¹ According to Larissa Bombardi, in her book "Geografia do uso de agrotóxicos no Brasil e conexões com a União Europeia" [Geography of the use of pesticides in Brazil and connections with the European Union], nearly 25% of pesticides used in Brazil are prohibited in the European Union.

² INPE is the National Institute for Space Research. It is developing the Prodes Project, which maps deforestation in the Cerrado biome. Data on the deforestation of the Cerrado have been systematized on the INPE's platform, available from: [Projeto Monitoramento do Cerrado – FIP FM Cerrado \(inpe.br\)](https://projeto-monitoramento-do-cerrado-fip-fm-cerrado.inpe.br)

³ MapBiomas is a multi-institutional platform involving NGOs, universities and technology companies whose goal is to monitor, map and disseminate data on land cover and land use in Brazil annually. MapBiomas' most recent report, which contains data on deforestation in the Cerrado, is available from: [RAD2021 Completo FINAL Rev1.pdf](https://rad2021.completo.final.rev1.pdf)

⁴ For more information on the expansion of soy in the Matopiba region and its relationship with deforestation and violations of the human rights of the peoples of the Cerrado, see: [Design sem nome \(matopibagrilagem.org\)](https://matopibagrilagem.org)



Between 8 and 10 July 2022, the Campaign held the **Final Hearing** of the Session in Defence of the Territories of the Cerrado (49th session)⁵ of the **Permanent Peoples' Tribunal (PPT)**⁶. During the hearing, 15 cases were presented to denounce the violations of the rights of traditional, quilombola and peasant communities and indigenous peoples and brought the deforestation to light. **The PPT jury recognized the crime of ecocide against the Cerrado and of genocide against its peoples** and condemned the Brazilian state, foreign bodies and states, the current government and national and foreign companies for the respective crimes.

One of the parties condemned by the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal was the European Union, as its massive purchases of agricultural products, especially soy, contribute to the process of ecocide and genocide in the Cerrado. According to the PTT, the massive importation of commodities from the Cerrado leaves a wake of destruction and violence for the peoples.

The PPT drew special attention to the proposal of a “regulation on making available on the Union market as well as export from the Union of certain commodities and products associated with deforestation and forest degradation, presented by the European Commission on 17 November 2021. The EU is currently responsible for 16% of tropical deforestation linked to the international trade of commodities such as soy or palm oil. **Approximately 20% of Brazil’s soy exports and at least 17% of its beef exports to the EU may be connected to illegal deforestation.** The draft regulation attempts to curb the impact that the consumption of certain products has on global deforestation and to do so, it imposes restrictions on the import, export, production and sale of these products in the EU”. However, **the PPT points out that the proposal has serious limitations that directly affect the Cerrado and its peoples.** We, from the Campaign, wish to highlight the following:

- The proposed regulation would only protect areas and regions defined as “forests”. This approach would leave a large portion (74%) of the Cerrado without protection, as it would exclude pastureland, savannahs or wetlands.
- The current draft does not guarantee that traceability requirements will apply to the place where the raw materials are produced.

⁵ Information on the Cerrado Session of the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal is available from: [Home - TPP \(tribunal.cerrado.org.br\)](https://tribunal.cerrado.org.br)

⁶ The Permanent Peoples' Tribunal (PPT) is an international opinion tribunal based in Rome. It was founded in Bologna in 1979 and its main instrument is the Universal Declaration of Peoples' Rights (Argelia, 1976). For more information on the PPT, see: [Tribunale Permanente dei Popoli \(permanentepeopletribunal.org\)](https://permanentepeopletribunal.org)



- The proposal does not set out requirements to respect human rights, especially the rights of indigenous peoples and traditional communities, including the requirement to respect customary tenure rights and the right to free, prior and informed consent.

In view of this, in its final verdict, the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal demands that the European Union make substantial changes to the Proposal for a regulation on the commercialization on the European market and the export from the Union of certain commodities and products associated with deforestation and forest degradation so as to align the text with human rights and environmental protections and with the fight against climate change.

We are at the dawn of the 21st century and we believe that we need to change the development paradigm that excludes the majority of the Brazilian population from the economic benefits generated by the unprecedented exploration of the goods of nature, which are highly abundant in our country. By regulating deforestation imports, we can advance towards strengthening the protection of the Cerrado and traditional peoples and communities' territories.

Our campaign's slogan is "Without the Cerrado, there is no water and no life".

This is what we believe awaits us in the near future, should there be no change in the current course of public policies related to the protection of human and socioenvironmental rights that are overshadowed by economic policies that are highly dependent on the production of commodities, even if it means **sacrificing the most biodiverse savannah on the planet!**

If we take no action as a global alliance, in less than three decades, new generations will never have the chance to see and experience the Cerrado and all of its biodiversity. We are sending with this letter the summary of the PPT verdict and the recommendations of the National Campaign in Defence of the Cerrado, endorsed by the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal, which constitute the minimum measures urgently needed to protect the water, territories, socio-biodiversity, food sovereignty and the self-determination of the peoples of the Cerrado.

When we make a commitment to defend the Cerrado and its people, we commit to defending life.