

Chronology of events - 31 August 2011 in Suko Betano

- Over the last several months the community of Betano has been working to defend their rights to their land which was taken from them by the State without transparency, consultation or due process and with much manipulation of evidence and exploitation of the community. Last month those of the District Manufahi, Suko Betano Youth Movement (MJDMSB) organised to show solidarity to their families in Betano. Last week MJDMSB sent a letter of notification to the District Police the District Administrator and local leaders informing that they would organise a peaceful action in Betano on 31 August 2011.
- Last week his excellency the President of the Republic made statements to TVTL stating “electricity should already be giving light to both the north and south coasts except for some stubborn communities who stubbornly delay the process.” (TVTL: 19 August 11). According to the President because of these delays “the State should use force in order to take land for development.” He added that “The Prime Minister is too generous in these things, when we compare to other nations who are developed and who take land using force for the purposes of development.” (Please see the Rede ba Rai statement on the Rede ba Rai Facebook page made on the 26/08/2011 for further details.)
- Yesterday on 31 August 2011, approximately 100 people from the community and the youth movement organised and began a peaceful protest in Betano. They carried banners and discussed the advantages and disadvantages of the case.
- At 11am the Timor-Leste National Police (PNTL) arrived, threatened the community, shot their guns into the air, beat five people, and used insulting language against the community, the PNTL were heard to say “no one will impede this project”.
- The PNTL arrested nine youth who were involved in the peaceful demonstration and detained them at the police station in Manufahi.
- The nine youth were kept in detention until night time on 31 August 2011, and tomorrow will be taken to Covalima District Court to file a case against them.

Rede ba Rai and the Front Mahasiswa will hold a press conference and issue a joint resolution on this case (below) at 10:30am on 1 September 2011 at UNTL.

For more information please contact the National Co-ordinator of Rede ba Rai, Santana A. Fernandes 7922648 or by email at redebarai@gmail.com.

Resolution of the Student Front (Front Mahasiswa) and Land Rights Network (Rede ba Rai)

No. 01/082011/RbR-FM

This year the people of Timor-Leste prepare for 2012, when they will celebrate and pay homage to the heroic and historic events of the last 500 years - the fight against colonialism, the fight against human exploitation, against the manipulation of our people's land and the events which illustrate the nationalism of Timor-Leste.

Dom Boa Ventura was a big star of our history whose story shows that when the rights of our people are exploited, manipulated and violated by others we must show courage and resistance to these acts.

The people of Suko Betano, Manufahi districts are again showing the public that they will not remain quiet in the face of exploitation.

The People of Betano, Aldeia Bemeta months ago offered four hectares of their land to the Government in order to construct a heavy oil power station. Recently the Government contracted Tinolina Construction Ltd, to prepare the site. During this process they occupied more land.

Because this occupation of land was more than the original agreement between the Government and the Community, the community began to organize themselves as is their right, consecrated in the Constitution as People of an "independent nation".

The Government and the Company showed a lack of transparency and much manipulation of facts throughout the entire process, and there are many inconsistencies in their story. The process in the field shows that the Company has already cleared the trees and other resources that are of such importance and value to the lives of the Community.

Because of this the community carried out a peaceful action in the field on 31 August 2011. However the community suffered violent actions from the Police who went to intervene and prevent this peaceful demonstration.

Despite the fact that the organisers of this process had followed the proper processes in notifying police and district authorities, the police intervened and stopped the process.

The Police intervened by shooting into the air, beating five community members and student representatives who were supporting the communities peaceful action. (Please refer to the above chronology.)

Recommendations

Examining these facts and the abuses of human rights in the field, Rede ba Rai and the Front Mahasiswa demand the following of the State and the competent authorities:

To his Excellency the President of the Republic:

1. Create an investigation team composed of the Attorney General, the National Parliament, the Minister for Justice, the Provedor for Human Rights, Civil Society and the Church in order to ascertain the facts and listen to the demands and needs of the community in order to prevent any future abuses of human rights and occupation of land.
2. Clarify the statements which the President himself made last week when he called for the "use of force against people who would not give up their land for development" so that the Police and other entities do not interpret this as a right to abuse the rights of the people. The President is the final word in guaranteeing respect for the rights of the people and should guarantee that the entire state is acting in respect of the Constitution of the Republic.

3. Accept and meet representatives of the People of Betano in order to listen to their stories about this case.

To their Excellencies the President of the National Parliament and the President of Commission A:

1. Parliament must produce a law which guarantees people's rights and access to land. When this process is not undertaken quickly, it creates conditions for the Government to further violate the human rights of the people in future land cases as has already happened in the cases of Betano, Brimob and others.
2. Create an *ad hoc* Commission in Parliament to immediately investigate this case.

To his Excellency the Prime Minister of RDTL:

1. Carry out transparent consultations and allocate sufficient resources for the fair and just acquisition of people's land;
2. Commit that the Government of RDTL will not carry out any further expropriations until there is a law which guarantees the rights of the People;
3. Government must show its commitment to resolving this cases so that other cases will not threaten the GOTL's slogan "Goodbye conflict – Welcome development" (*Adeus konfliktu-bemvindo desenvolvimento*)

To the District Commander of Manufahi:

1. Within 24 hours from receiving this declaration, release without condition the nine "demonstrators" who were detained on 31 August 2011 at 11am.
2. Investigate the work and administrative processes of the Police during the incident of 31 August 2011 when the Police went to act, used force as threats against the people, and risked the lives of community members with "the people's weapons".
3. Take action to prevent any further violence or torture of those detained by the Police, and ensure their freedom to request legal assistance that may be necessary for their case.

To the Provider for Human Rights:

1. Send an investigation team to the field in order to get adequate information for the State to undertake a fair and just process;

To all of the People:

1. To all of the people and Movements of Timor who respect the values and the struggle of Dom Boaventura, follow the lead of the people of Betano-Manufahi in order to maintain our opposition to the exploitation of the Maubere People,
2. Valorize the land of the people and strengthen the concepts independence and of "dignity as a people free from exploitation".

Dili, 31 August 2011
