



The Right Livelihood Award

for outstanding vision and work on behalf of our planet and its people

Erwin Kräutler (Brazil)

(2010)



"...for a lifetime of work for the human and environmental rights of indigenous peoples and for his tireless efforts to save the Amazon forest from destruction."

Picture: Karl Gabor

Erwin Kräutler, a Catholic Bishop motivated by liberation theology, is one of Brazil's most important defenders of and advocates for the rights of indigenous peoples. Already in the 1980s, he helped secure the inclusion of indigenous peoples' rights into the Brazilian constitution. He also plays an important role in opposing one of South America's largest and most controversial energy projects: the Belo Monte dam.

Kräutler was born in Austria on July 12th, 1939, became a priest in 1965 and shortly after went to Brazil as a missionary. In 1978, he became a Brazilian citizen (though also keeping his Austrian citizenship). He worked among the people of the Xingu-Valley, who include indigenous peoples of different ethnic groups. In 1980, Kräutler was appointed Bishop of Xingu, the largest diocese in Brazil. From 1983-1991, and since 2006 he is the President of the Indigenous Missionary Council (CIMI) of the Catholic Church in Brazil.

Kräutler is motivated in his work by the teachings of liberation theology. He teaches that a Christian has to take the side of the powerless and to oppose their exploiters.

Working for indigenous peoples' rights

For five centuries, the population of Brazil's indigenous peoples has constantly decreased - and the downward trend still continues. Today the causes are well-known and documented, including direct (yet rarely investigated) violence in connection with the appropriation of indigenous land; land grabs for energy, settlement, mining, industry, farming, cattle, and agribusiness projects; and military projects for national security that aim to open up areas.

During Kräutler's presidency, CIMI has become one of the most important defenders of indigenous rights, with a focus on land rights, self-organisation and health care in Indian territories. In 1988, CIMI's intensive lobbying helped secure the inclusion of indigenous people's rights in the Brazilian Constitution. The Council has also raised awareness within the Church about indigenous people's issues and rights.

Since 1992 and besides CIMI's advocacy work, Kräutler has continued working tirelessly for the Xingu on the ground. The projects he has initiated include building houses for poor people, running schools, building a facility for mothers, pregnant women and children, founding a 'refugio' for recuperation after hospital treatment, emergency aid, legal support, and work on farmers' rights and land demarcation.

Opposing the Belo Monte dam

For 30 years, Kräutler has been very active in the struggle against the plans for the huge Belo Monte dam on the Xingu River, nowadays heavily promoted by President Lula, which would be the third largest dam in the world. The dam would destroy 1000 square km of forest, flood a third of the capital city, Altamira, and create a lake of stagnant, mosquito-infested water of about 500 square km, which would make life in the rest of the city very difficult. 30,000 people would have to be relocated.

Threats

Kräutler's commitment and outspokenness have put him at constant personal risk. In October 1987, some months before the decision to grant full civil rights to indigenous peoples was taken in the constituent assembly, he was seriously injured in a, suspected planned, car crash. Since 2006, Kräutler has been under round-the-clock police protection, partly because he insisted on a full investigation following the murder of the environmental activist Sister Dorothy Stang in 2005 who, since 1982, had worked closely with him. More recently he has received death threats because of his opposition to the Belo Monte dam and because he took legal action against a criminal group involved in sexual abuse of minors.

Awards & books

In 1989, Kräutler received the Grosser Binding-Preis für Natur und Umweltschutz (Principality of Liechtenstein) and in 2009 an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Salzburg, Austria. The citation called Kräutler "the personification of outrage against societal conditions that violate human dignity for all those who consider that human dignity and the preservation of Creation are more than just void words without meaning, and he embodies for us the hope that another world indeed is possible".

Kräutler has written a number of books, most recently *Rot wie Blut die Blumen - Ein Bischof zwischen Leben und Tod (Flowers Red as Blood: a Bishop Between Life and Death)*, published in German in 2009.

Quotation

"I'm convinced that another world is possible, in which indigenous and poor people finally shall live in dignity and peace."

Bishop Erwin Kräutler