

Universidade de Massachusetts, em Boston indicates ABA for the Nobel prize

The Brazilian Anthropological Association is today in Brazil the main defender of indigenous peoples, descendants of runaway slaves (Quilombos), and other endangered isolated communities.

The Brazilian Anthropological Association (Associação Brasileira de Antropologia, ABA) was founded in 1955. It has a President, a secretariat of 4 people, and 1,310 members. All are scholars who feel compelled to leave the ivory tower to advocate publicly for indigenous peoples, descendants of runaway slaves, landless peasants, isolated communities of fishermen, rubber collectors, and other endangered communities in Brazil.

In the past, ABA efficiently lobbied legislators and governments, alerted the media, lawyers, and civil society in general on minority rights. In the 1970s and the 1980s, it stood against the military regime against laws that would have opened indigenous lands to development projects. ABA has led or participated in many successful campaigns against goldminers or landgrabbers who invaded demarcated lands in the Amazon region, or when community leaders were being murdered. In 1987-1988, when Brazil's new, democratic Constitution was being drafted, ABA very successfully lobbied legislators so they would recognize the land rights of descendants of runaway slaves. ABA has acquired considerable stature because of its humanism, moderation, and because of the personality, ethics, and stature of its successive presidents.

Today, the political climate has radically worsened. The rights and physical integrity of many communities, particularly in the Amazon region, are under threat as never since the return of democracy. Several of ABA's members are intimidated or even threatened by ranchers; six tenured professors of anthropology were being sued by a state prosecutor on the flimsiest charges. The current government has created a climate of impunity and has formally announced that all demarcated lands are opened to land prospectors. This could lead to massive cultural extinction. In this context, such a recognition as a Nobel Prize would have a colossal impact on Brazilian society today.