



MINISTÉRIO PÚBLICO FEDERAL
PROCURADORIA DA REPÚBLICA NO ESTADO DE RORAIMA

Ofício n.º 022/2005 – MF/MPF/PR/RR

Boa Vista – RR, July 29th, 2005.


Subject: Yanomami blood samples.

Dear Madam,

In the 1960s and 1970s, Dr. James Neel and other U.S. scientists collected blood samples from the Yanomami Indians in Brazil and Venezuela. In 2002, Yanomami leaders in Brazil requested the Attorney General's Office (responsible for the legal defense of the interests and rights of indigenous peoples in the country) to take the necessary steps to locate and retrieve those samples taken from their deceased relatives, as well as the genetic material that might have been derived from the samples.

In March 2002 we wrote to Professor Kenneth Weiss at the Department of Anthropology in your University requesting information about whether or not there were Yanomami blood samples at Penn State. On April 8th 2002 Professor Weiss confirmed that there were three thousand Yanomami samples in his lab at Penn State.

Both the samples and the genetic material represent for the Yanomami the remains of their relatives which need to go through the proper funeral ceremonies. They take these ceremonies to be essential not only to the deceased's spiritual peace, but also to the respect of their culture. According to the Brazilian authorities who are following the case, in collecting these samples the researchers did not observe the norms established by the international codes of bioethics (The 1947 Nuremberg Code, and the 1964 Helsinki I


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Declaration). Considering that the samples are at present being used for the extraction of genetic material, again without the consent of the Yanomami, I henceforth ask you whether your institution might agree to willingly return those blood samples and genetic material to the Yanomami who made the original request. I would also like to request that you keep us informed about possible cases of exchange of Yanomami blood and/or genetic material between your University and other institutions.

We take this opportunity to thank Penn State and Professor Weiss for the attention given to our queries and to express our conviction that we can have your cooperation in the future.

Enclosed you will find a copy of the Brazilian Constitution attesting to the legitimacy of the Attorney General's Office to pose these questions.

Yours sincerely,


MAURÍCIO FABRETTI
Deputy Attorney of Brazil