Brazil's Supreme Court Shelves Key Ruling on Indigenous Land Rights

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This week, Brazil's Supreme Court was supposed to resume a trial regarding a legal challenge filed by Brazil's northernmost state, Roraima, against a presidential decree mandating consultations with indigenous peoples before carrying out public infrastructure projects. The decree is part of a bigger commitment to Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization, under which governments must carry out free, prior and informed consultation with indigenous and traditional communities whenever legislative or administrative measures, such as highways, hydroelectric dams, mining or power lines, may directly affect their livelihoods or lands.

However, on 19th November, the Court decided to remove it from its calendar, without a postponement date yet set. This decision signals possible behind-the-scenes pressures on the matter, with Brazil struggling to balance Amazonian infrastructure demands and environmental and human rights treaty commitments.

Almost half of Roraima's territory is federally recognised as indigenous land. Roraima's government argues that this decree blocks local infrastructure development, most notably the paving of highway BR-174 and the *Linhão de Tucuruí*, a high-voltage power line connecting the state to Brazil's national grid, which would make the state less dependent on Venezuelan energy. The state therefore claims that ILO Convention 169 infringes state sovereignty and national development.

The case offers a clear example of the difficulties faced by the country, as political, economic and environmental interests collide in the Amazon. By freezing the trial indefinitely, the Court has left both local developments and Indigenous legal safeguards in limbo.

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