

Eyewitness report from Brazil, meeting with Bishop Casaldáliga



We have met 82-year-old Bishop Pedro Casaldáliga, who is highly respected for his work alongside the landless and oppressed in Brazil. Pedro Casaldáliga is one of the leading champions of the Latin American option for the poor and of the theology of liberation. Since 1968 he has worked in the Brazilian Amazon region, and from 1971 to 2005 he was bishop of the diocese of São Félix do Araguaia.

When he became bishop, the Brazilian military regime was opening up the Brazilian Amazon, driving roads through the rainforest and encouraging entrepreneurs from the south to fell the forest for timber, create cattle ranches and extract the region's minerals. This process took a heavy toll on the indigenous peoples of the region and on the small farmers who had settled there, and anyone who opposed this process of 'development' was likely to face violence, like Casaldáliga's assistant, Jesuit

João Bosco Penido Burnier, who was murdered by a police officer here in Ribeirão Cascalheira when he threatened to report him for torture . Bishop Casaldáliga devoted his ministry to the defence of the indigenous and small farmer. He has always tried to live simply, for example travelling by bus for days across Brazil rather than taking a plane.

Bishop Casaldáliga is a fierce critic of the abuse of power, whether by the United States in its relations with Latin America – or the adjustment policies forced on the region by the International Monetary Fund. He has also criticised ostentation and luxury in the Church, especially the Vatican. We are welcomed with gentleness and warmth by Bishop Casaldáliga, who thanked CAFOD and it's supporters for its solidarity over the years.

CAFOD's representative in Westminster Diocese, Tony Sheen, is currently in Brazil visiting partners in the country.

Tony Sheen - Cafod