

Speech given by Governor of Acre Jorge Viana at the “Ayahuasca Seminar” (Rio Branco, Acre, March 8-9, 2006)

Friends, in my name and in the name of the Vice-Governor [Arnóbio Marques] here by my side, of Secretary Monteiro [Antonio Monteiro Neto, Secretary of Justice and Public Security of Acre], and of other people who help us in the government and who are present here, I would like to congratulate you all on the success of this event. I would also like to express my regret at not have been able to be present. If I could have, I would not have missed this opportunity, these two days of conviviality with this aura of good souls that you have here, as [National Antidrug] Secretary [Paulo Roberto Yog de Miranda] Uchoa said. I regret not having participated; I was with Binho [Arnóbio Marques] in a very heavily loaded morning. Even so, we decided that we had to come here, first to greet everyone, to show solidarity, to be together, and also to participate, even if only in the closing of this event. Holding this event here is very important for our state and for our society.

I have no doubt that for the first time Brazil, our country, is beginning to treat this subject with seriousness and in an appropriate way. After I entered politics, I went to many hearings in the [Governor's] Palace with my brother, Senator Tião Viana, and with others, to try to work together with the communities that use ayahuasca to avoid aggression toward them, aggression toward a religious ritual that is part of our culture, of people's lives, of a large part of the society. On these occasions, I tried to give testament to the fact that this is part of our culture, of the life of our population, of our humble people. It is something very much ours, something unknown and which cannot be seen with prejudice, much less with pre-fabricated cliches made up to answer to the interests of the press, or even other interests that we cannot even make out.

I consider the coming of the Secretary to hold this meeting and treat this subject in this way a conquest. A conquest by all of you, by all of us who battle for this. The problem of the communities that use Daime is only found where there is ignorance, when there is prejudice, perspectives formed without knowledge. When there is knowledge about the communities the problem ends. I see the gesture of the Secretary in holding this event as something very important. This Seminar is establishing for all a new history.

The fathers, mothers, the children and the elderly of these communities have to live with a series of difficulties. They have to live with eternal suspicions that they are “druggies,” that they are dealing with something illicit. This is a very strong thing that speaks not to these communities, it speaks to the Brazilian State, to Brazilian institutions. I am happy to see in the Secretary this determination to work together so that what is done in Acre and in other regions of Amazonia and in our country may be a reference for the world, so that we may show the world an appropriate way to deal with these communities. That is what I wanted to say, in my name, in the name of the Vice-Governor, and of the government as a whole.

I want also to say that that I have a lot of pride in the fact that Acre is home to so many communities. We live in a world that, unfortunately, is very egotistical, unjust and unequal. I don't know why, but it seems like most of the time the bad sides of human beings are emphasized, leaving aside the good part, which all of us have. Perhaps these communities are better able to work on people's good side, on the conviviality of human community, than the government, many human organizations, and the State are



able to do. I am not talking about perfection, I am talking about good things, of communion.

I think that we can contribute a lot to making this happen if we break once and for all with the distance between what happens here and what is thought to happen here. Media reports, even the ones with good intentions, those done with greater responsibility, are unable to communicate this relationship, these environments within which people live. They are always full of clichés and treat the question as if it were an attraction, like sensationalistic news. I have always been against this point of view and I think that, for the first time, Brazil is treating these communities with respect and seriousness.

It is important that this space is being created in the government of president Lula. He knows Brazil, he knows the Brazilian reality. I had, and continue to have, confidence that this type of attitude that is being displayed today is the fruit of the changes that Brazil is experiencing. In the past it was not like this, until recently it was not like this, and now it is. And we, here in Acre, independent of the functions that we have, we are one Acrean people; we all have this perspective, we learn to have this perspective. I learned from my friends Toinho [Antonio Alves, journalist and writer], Cosmo [Lima de Souza, state prosecutor], Jair [Facundes, federal judge] and some many others through whom I have had the opportunity to get to know these communities. And the relationship that we try to have is one of much respect, and even gratitude, for the work that these communities pursue here in the region, especially here in Acre.

I just want to thank everyone once more and to ask forgiveness for the delay on my and the Vice-Governor's part. I also want to say that we are very pleased and honored. I close with this: I think that the history and the institutional relationship of our country with the communities that use the tea will change definitively as a result of this Seminar—as many dreamed, as many believed. Now this belief and this dream have become reality. Thank you very much.

Audience applause.

[Presentation transcribed by Rafael Santos and edited by Isabel de Rose; translated by Matthew Meyer]