

Brazilian bishop on hunger strike again

The Miami Herald
Nov. 27, 2007

SAO PAULO, Brazil --

A Catholic bishop on Tuesday began his second hunger strike in two years to protest a government project to divert river water to irrigate parts of the country's arid northeast.

Bishop Luiz Flavio Cappio sent a letter to President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva saying he was protesting the government's failure to hold promised public debates and discussions on the project.

Those promises persuaded Cappio to end his first, 11-day hunger strike in 2005, when he protested plans to change the course of the Sao Francisco River that winds through the Brazil's drought-ridden northeast to the Atlantic.

"You have deceived me and all of Brazilian society," Cappio said in his letter, which the Church's Land Pastoral office distributed to reporters.

He said he would now only end his hunger strike when the project is permanently suspended.

In June, army engineers began preliminary work on the \$2 billion project that Cappio and environmentalists say will cause widespread environmental damage to the 1,600-mile river, Brazil's fourth-largest.

The government says that changing river's course will benefit some 12 million poor people.

The National Integration Ministry, which oversees the project, said the bishop's hunger strike would not affect the project.

"We are very sorry that the bishop, by attempting against his own life, has adopted a stance that goes against the teachings of the church," Minister Geddel Vieira Lima, said by telephone. "We will not negotiate or stop work on the project."