I am a 51-year-old woman and at 40 I was diagnosed with breast cancer. At that time, I underwent chemotherapy and radiation therapy, lost my hair, gained 20 kilograms, became unrecognizable, and almost died. In 2015, I had metastasis in my lumbar spine, experiencing excruciating pain only bearable with high doses of morphine. I lost the use of my legs, spent months in the hospital, and then had to use a wheelchair and relearn how to walk. In 2020, for the third time, I had to treat cancer, this time in my cervical spine. During the treatment, I lost my voice and the ability to eat, losing 10 kilograms in two weeks during the pandemic. At this moment, I am undergoing my fourth cancer treatment.

I received most of my treatment through the public healthcare system in my country, which I proudly support. I believe in a public, comprehensive, and high-quality healthcare system. It was after turning 40 that I had access to public policies and obtained a scholarship for a Master's degree. Later, I passed a public university professorship exam. I went on to earn my Ph.D., conducting research on settlements, women, indigenous peoples, agroecology, and food sovereignty.

Currently, I live and work in the region where I was born, in Dourados, Mato Grosso do Sul, in the Midwest region of Brazil, on the border with Paraguay.

The numerous tests I underwent showed that the cancer was not of genetic origin but "probably" due to environmental contamination. We are going through a pandemic, and we have all fought hard for the continuity of life. However, in recent years, I have witnessed another epidemic unfolding before my eyes: a staggering increase in cancer cases. It used to be rare, and now every one of us has someone in our family, neighborhood, or friends affected. According to the National Cancer Institute, there will be over 700,000 new cancer cases per year in Brazil until 2025! Almost 60,000 new cases per month! The response from the government and corporations is to build "cancer hospitals" instead of questioning the corporate food system anchored in agribusiness, which produces cancer!

Like me, thousands of people in Brazil and around the world are now being contaminated, and tragically, the children of the future will be born on a contaminated planet without having had a chance to choose how they want to live. Here, where I live, research indicated before the pandemic that the average pesticide consumption per inhabitant was 40 liters per year, while in Brazil, it is 7 liters, and certainly today the numbers are much higher.

Do we have the right to contaminate future generations? Don't they have the human right to be born with dignity?
Currently, I undergo oncological treatment that combines therapy with tablets produced by a US company, costing around 20,000 Brazilian reais per month, and monthly injections (currently covered by health insurance after a struggle). These are the same corporations that produce poison and medicine, a logic of commodifying care, life, and death.

In addition to this treatment, I seek to understand a bit about natural medicine to detoxify my body. I use medicinal cannabis oil, consume agroecological foods produced by settlements in my region, I am learning about healthy cooking, and I take care of my mind. I am connected to a spirituality that sees God in all creatures that inhabit the planet.

I strive to live a balanced life, taking care of my health, being a mother to two young children and a 15-year-old teenager, having a social life filled with friends, and being part of a large and beautiful extended family that provides support. I also have the demands of my work, as I love being an educator and learning from my people. The life expectancy for women in Brazil is currently 80 years. I don't know how many years I have ahead of me, none of us knows the mystery of life! However, under healthy conditions, the expectation would be that I live another 30 years! In recent times, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, I don't know what else to do to survive: while I fight ardently to keep living, while my doctors and I study daily on how to prolong life with quality, my environment is being completely poisoned!

I live in the region covered by the Guarani Aquifer, one of the largest freshwater reserves in the world, spanning Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay. The most important river that supplies water to more than half of the houses in the city where I live - the Dourados River - is contaminated with 32 types of pesticides, provenly so. Around my house, the pesticide called "weed killer" is used indiscriminately for "chemical weeding" in urban areas. Here, airplanes are used for aerial spraying, in addition to machines and tractors that spray pesticides close to the ground.

The air I breathe on the way from my home to my workplace is so contaminated with pesticides - especially during the soybean and corn seasons - that it causes a strong odor, to the point of making me nauseous, giving me headaches, and making me feel like vomiting!
In Brazil, the allowed doses of pesticides such as glyphosate - the most widely used in the country - are up to 5,000 times higher than the permitted dosages in Europe. Factories banned in rich countries have ended up in our countries. They deceive us by saying that we are poor, but it's a lie. Our country has abundant land, water, biodiversity, and hardworking people. I come from the rural people, from my ancestors. And when I lived in the settlement, I experienced overcoming hunger with healthy and pesticide-free food. There are many ways to live and produce abundantly without poisons!

As a teacher, I witness an increase in autism, Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's, miscarriages, depression, suicide, and new rare diseases. In our land, we travel hundreds of kilometers seeing only monocultures of soybean, corn, sugarcane, and eucalyptus. From where I stand, they have removed the trees along the roadsides, evicted the indigenous people who lived in makeshift tents on the highway margins to make way for soybean cultivation! And the younger
generations born here, for the most part, have no idea that our region was once dominated by the Atlantic Forest biome, with its towering trees that used to meet at the treetops.

In my place, there is an alliance between politicians, big corporations, institutions, corporate media, and lobbying, where money is always more important than anything else. In my place, the political system has nothing to do with the origin of the word, the pursuit of the "polis" or the common good, as it should be. There is a daily campaign to influence people's consciousness in support of the project called "agribusiness," which should be called "ogribusiness."

When "they" arrived here - the ruling elites - they killed the indigenous peoples and continue to do so today. They created a false image that they are "modern" and responsible for a so-called "development," which actually translates into poisoning and environmental destruction, territorial violence, and increasing social inequality. Here, in 2/5 of our territory, an indigenous baby died of hunger at only 1 year and 3 months old. They arrived and made deals behind closed doors: politicians, businessmen, the wealthy who mostly live in SP, PR, RJ, or abroad, and they use our place as a dumping ground for waste, chemical pollutants, and intense exploitation of vulnerable workers, especially indigenous people and women, to profit above all else. No one asked us, the people from here, if we allowed them to poison our bodies, our water, our food, our air. Even breast milk contamination has been proven in our region. How can a woman have a child and know that even her milk is poisoned?

In Brazil, it is shameful how television propaganda in favor of this production model is deceptive, and daily tries to implant the idea in people's minds that agribusiness is the salvation of our country. Millions of dollars are invested in advertising, unpaid taxes, numerous laws to benefit the farmers, infrastructure for them – it is a big business funded by the Brazilian state. How about the same amount of support for agroecology-based production?

And astonishingly, now this agribusiness production model is gaining more space in prime time television through a soap opera, which portrays and idolizes soybean agribusiness, hiding slave labor, environmental destruction, and contamination of people... It was filmed in my land. Why don't we have a soap opera that portrays agroecological production methods?

They changed our environmental legislation to allow even more destruction! What planet are they from? Because on Earth, we need water, land, air, and food to live! In Mato Grosso do Sul, 83% of the land is occupied by giant latifundia, which do not produce food for the state. We import over 80% of our food. I don't know who to turn to: the mass media turns a blind eye, and only a few fulfill their social and responsible role of promoting serious debates and alerting the population. The political class, in the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, mostly has their elections funded by big corporations! Help! Who do we plead with for respect for our human rights to have clean water, food, air, and land without poison?

This Brazil is ours, belonging to the working people! We should trust our elected officials, and they should ask us, "What do we want for our country?" because we have the right to decide. A country only has sovereignty if its people have land and conditions for a dignified life. In a
country of this size and agricultural potential, if agribusiness were fair, no one would go hungry, and no one would die of hunger and cold on the streets.

They should regulate, limit, and legislate in favor of a program to reduce pesticides, not increase authorization to release more poisons. They should transition to other forms of production and living. Here, it's the poison; in the Yanomami territory, it's mercury; in Bolivia, it's aluminum... Can't humanity see the impacts of this way of producing life on human beings, animals, plants, and climate change?

The state of Ceará is the only one in Brazil that has a law against aerial spraying. And the ruralist caucus, funded by agribusiness lobbying, brought the case to the Supreme Court to overturn the law when, in fact, the law should serve as a reference for all states. It is simply despairing: I feel like I'm in the midst of a war. It's not the insane war between Russia and Ukraine; I don't see soldiers armed on the streets shooting bullets. But here, another brutal and insane war prevails: I feel every day in the air, in the water, and in the food that they are killing us with poisons and the misery of social inequality.

Today, I feel expelled from my own land! How can I continue living amidst the poison? My treatment is complex, long, and continuous. And I know that it largely depends on having good nutrition, tranquility, and balanced environmental conditions.

I love life so much! I want to keep living so badly! I live well; I don't have other diseases. I have family, friends, projects, spirituality. I love art, poetry, culture, travel, kindness, knowledge! I understand that life is fragile and strong! And within us resides the capacity to overcome, invent, build, love, survive, and fight every day for what is good, beautiful, and just! Our passage on this planet is very brief! What can we do here and now?

Sandra Procópio da Silva - Dourados/MS, World Environment Week, 2023.