

UA 161/02

Fear for**BRAZIL**Frei Anastácio Ribeiro (m), human rights defender
Eight rural workers

Amnesty International is seriously concerned for the safety of Frei Anastácio Ribeiro, state deputy and coordinator of the Pastoral Land Commission in Paraíba, northeastern Brazil. A plan to kill him has reportedly been discovered in a police station in the state capital, João Pessoa.

A civil policeman, who was recently attacked in an ambush in the municipality of Mogeiro, has accused Frei Anastácio of plotting to kill him. The policeman, who also works as a security guard for landowners in the region, was named in a recent report concerning rural violence in the state, as a person involved with torture and acts of violence related to land disputes in the state. Frei Anastácio has been denouncing the illegal activities of this civil policeman for two years.

Eight rural workers who live in Mogeiro have been arrested and accused of planning the attack on the policeman. According to information received no evidence against these men exists, but despite this they have been tortured in order to make them confess. Torture is commonly used as a substitute for technical and scientific criminal investigation in Brazil.

There is currently a climate of tension in Paraíba, that has been heightened by the unsolved assassination of a mayor and his driver in a small town in the state's interior two weeks ago. Amnesty International believes that elements hostile to Frei Anastácio's work in defence of human rights and land reform might seek to profit from this instability in order to kill him.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The report on rural violence in Paraíba, the result of an enquiry by the state authorities, was published last year, and detailed rising levels of violence - in the form of threats, intimidation, torture and killings - directed at landless peasants and rural activists in the state. Frei Anastácio was imprisoned as a result of his campaigning for land reform in 1996. After an international appeal he was subsequently released (see *Brazil: The criminalisation of rural activism: the case of Frei Anastácio Ribeiro* AMR 19/27/96).

Brazil has one of the most unequal patterns of land distribution in the world. Although Amnesty International does not take a position on competing claims for land ownership, the organisation has long documented grave human rights violations in the context of conflicts between landless peasants and large landowners throughout the country. Landless leaders are often threatened and attacked by gunmen in the pay of landowners. State authorities often fail to take action to stop such crimes or bring those responsible to justice, although recent positive news from Brazil has been the conviction of some of those responsible for the murder of 19 landless peasants in the Amazonian state of Pará in 1996.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Portuguese or your own language:

- calling on the authorities to take immediate steps to protect Frei Anastácio Ribeiro in the light of reports that there is a plan to kill him and that any protection provided be in accordance with his wishes;

- urging the authorities to investigate reports that there is a plan to kill Frei Anastácio Ribeiro;
- calling for an investigation into reports that rural workers were tortured and detained without charge following the ambush of a civil policeman earlier this month;
- urging that the authorities ensure that investigations into the ambush on a civil policeman be carried out without violating the human rights of any potential suspects;
- expressing your concern at the high levels of rural violence in the state documented in the *Relatório da CPI do Campo*, Report of the Paraíba parliamentary commission on rural violence and the failure of the authorities to bring to justice those state agents and their accomplices responsible for human rights violations against rural workers.

APPEALS TO:

Governor Paraíba

Exmo. Sr. Governador de Paraíba
 Roberto Paulino
 Palácio da Redenção
 Praça João Pessoa, Centro
 58013 - 901 João Pessoa - PB
 Brazil

Telegram: Governador de Paraíba, João Pessoa, Brazil

Fax: + 55 83 222 3857

Salutation: Vossa Excelência/Your Excellency

Public Security Secretary Paraíba

Secretário da Segurança Pública
 Francisco Glauberto Bezerra
 Avenida Hilton Souto Mayor, s/nº
 Mangabeira I
 58055-460 João Pessoa - PB
 Brazil

Telegram: Secretário da Segurança Pública, João Pessoa, Paraíba, Brazil

Fax: + 55 83 238 5583 (If someone answers say "Fax, por favor")

Salutation: Sr. Secretário/Dear Secretary

Federal Secretary for Human Rights

Paulo Sergio Pinheiro
 Secretaria de Estado dos Direitos Humanos_
 Ministério da Justiça_
 Esplanada dos Ministérios,
 Bloco T, 4º andar, Sala 420_
 70064-900 Brasília - DF
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Telegram: Secretário de Estado dos Direitos Humanos, Brasília, Brazil

Fax: + 55 61 223 2260/226 7980

Salutation: Sr, Secretário/Dear Federal Secretary

COPIES TO:

Human Rights Commission of Paraíba State Assembly
Comissão de Direitos Humanos da Assembleia Legislativa
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Diário da Borborema
Avenida Dom Pedro II 623
Centro, Campina Grande - PB Brazil

and to diplomatic representatives of Brazil accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 12 July 2002.