

UA 36/00

Fear for**BRAZIL** Carmen Lúcia do Amaral (f), human rights defender

Valter Melo, journalist

Neusa Maria dos Santos (f), wife of human rights defender João Elizio Lima Pessoa (killed) and mother of Júlio César Rocha dos Santos (killed)

João Elizio Lima Pessoa, who worked for the *Conselho Comunitário de Segurança Pública*, Public Security Community Council, was shot dead on 7 February 2000. Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of Council president Carmen Lúcia do Amaral, and of journalist Valter Melo, who published the Council's denunciations of death squad killings.

Amnesty International is also concerned for the safety of João Elizio Lima Pessoa's wife, Neusa Maria dos Santos, the only witness to his killing.

The Public Security Community Council in Águas Lindas, Goiás state, is a locally-elected body mandated to receive denunciations of violence and bring them to the attention of the authorities. Since 1997 João Elizio Lima Pessoa and Carmen Lúcia do Amaral had been denouncing the existence of a "death squad" in the Entorno region on the border between Goiás state and the Distrito Federal (Federal District - includes the capital, Brasília). The death squad, said to be responsible for at least 18 killings, is allegedly made up of military police. Valter Melo published these denunciations in his newspaper, *O Descoberto*. Their denunciations prompted an investigation by the Human Rights Commission of the Federal Chamber of Deputies (the upper house of the Brazilian parliament), *Comissão de Direitos Humanos da Câmara dos Deputados*. All three had been receiving death threats for some time.

João Elizio Lima Pessoa was driving home with Neusa Maria dos Santos on the night of 7 February, when he found the road blocked by rocks. When he got out of the car to clear the way he was shot three times in the head, and died immediately. Neusa Maria was shot in the chest and neck, but survived and is being treated in hospital.

The authorities in Goiás have suspended all police officers in Águas Lindas from duty pending a full investigation by police brought in from other areas. However, human rights groups are concerned that Carmen Lúcia do Amaral, Valter Melo and Neusa Maria dos Santos will be in danger for some time unless effective steps are taken to protect them.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The population of the Entorno region has exploded from 5,000 to 100,000 in only five years. Impoverished families are reportedly attracted to the area by promises of plots of land in exchange for votes. The state and its social structures are largely absent from the area, abandoning it to lawlessness. The Goiás Attorney General has estimated that 100 people may have been killed by one or more military police death squads involved in drug trafficking in the area.

In November 1998 Neusa Maria dos Santos's son, Júlio César Rocha dos Santos, 22, was shot and killed by police. The police maintain that he was shot during a robbery, but Neusa Maria and João Elizio believed that he was executed by

a death squad. The day after his stepson's death, shots were fired at the Community Council's offices.

Human rights defenders in Brazil are vulnerable to death threats, intimidation and attacks by police, death squads and hired gunmen who operate with official acquiescence. The Human Rights Commission of the Federal Chamber of Deputies is currently monitoring death squad activity in at least nine of Brazil's 26 states.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express/airmail letters in Portuguese or your own language:

- expressing concern at the killing João Elizio Lima Pessoa and the shooting of Neusa Maria dos Santos;
- expressing concern that Carmen Lúcia do Amaral and Valter Melo are at risk because of their denunciations of death squad activity in Águas Lindas, and that Neusa Maria dos Santos may be at risk as the only witness to the killing;
- welcoming the authorities' suspension of Águas Lindas police, and commitment to a full and independent investigation;
- urging the authorities to take effective steps to protect Carmen Lúcia do Amaral, Valter Melo and Neusa Maria dos Santos;
- expressing concern at reports that death squads have killed up to 100 people in the Entorno region in recent years;
- calling on the authorities to conduct a full and independent investigation into death squad activity in the Entorno region, and to bring those responsible to justice.

APPEALS TO:

Please note - many Brazilian fax numbers are also telephones. If a voice answers ask for the fax signal - "*Sinal do fax, por favor*".

Minister of Justice

Exmo. Sr. Ministro da Justiça do Brasil
Dr. José Carlos Dias
Ministério da Justiça
Esplanada dos Ministérios, Bloco 23
70064-900 - Brasília - DF
Brazil

Telegrams - Ministro Justiça - Brasília - Brasil

Fax: +55 61 224 2448/322 6817

Salutation: Vossa Excelência/ Your Excellency

Governor of Goiás state

Exmo. Sr. Governador do Estado de Goiás
Sr Marconi Ferreira Perillo
Palácio das Esmeraldas
Praça Dr Pedro Ludovico 1
74001-970 - Goiânia - GO
Brazil

Telegrams: Governador - Goiás - Brasil

Fax: + 55 62 213 1468

Salutation: Your Excellency/Vossa Excelência

Public Security Secretary - Goiás

Exmo. Secretário de Segurança Pública e Justiça do Estado de Goiás
Sr. Demóstenes Xavier Torres
Avenida Santos Dumont, 2233

Bloco A, Sala 230, Vila Nova
74653-040 - Goiânia - GO
Brazil

Telegrams: Secretário Segurança Pública - Goiás - Brasil

Fax: + 55 62 202 2332

Salutation: Exmo. Sr./ Dear Sir

COPIES TO:

Newspaper

O Descoberto

Editor Geral, Sr. Valter Melo

Q49 Lote 7, Loja 1

72900-000 - Santo Antônio do Descoberto - GO - Brazil

Federal Chamber of Deputies Human Rights Commission

Comissão de Direitos Humanos da Câmara dos Deputados

Anexo II - Ala A - SI 185

Câmara dos Deputados Federais

Praça dos Três Poderes

Brasília - DF - Brazil

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after 23 March 2000.