

# URGENT ACTION

## RURAL COMMUNITY THREATENED BY GUNMEN

**Forty-five families from the Quilombo Pontes community in Pirapemas, Maranhão state, Brazil, are being systematically threatened and intimidated by gunmen who are patrolling the area. The gunmen have been employed by local ranchers who are trying to push the community off the land. The community's crops and property have been destroyed and its members are struggling to provide food for their families.**

On 15 August, local ranchers released their cattle over the land of the Pontes community, destroying their crops. This included manioc plantations – the community's staple food. Since then armed men have been seen patrolling the forested outskirts of the small-holder plantations that make up the community's land and several community members have said that they are frightened of leaving their homes. The community is dependent on their food crops for survival and many families are now struggling to feed their children.

The Pontes community was officially recognised as a quilombo territory (communities composed by descendants of former runaway slaves) in December 2011, but the authorities have not intervened to guarantee the integrity of their land. The community has been left to fend for itself in a violent and lawless region. Many community leaders have received death threats; one, **Zé Patrício**, was included in the federal program for the protection of human rights defenders last October, but has received no assistance from the authorities since.

The Pontes community, along with the neighbouring quilombo community of Salgado have long suffered threats and persecution from neighbouring landowners. According to the *Comissão Pastoral da Terra* (Pastoral Land Commission, CPT), the state of Maranhão has become a focal point for land-related violence, with over 200 instances of land conflict in 2011, and more than a hundred community leaders receiving death threats.

### Please write immediately in Portuguese or your own language:

- Urging the authorities to guarantee the safety of the Quilombo Pontes community in Pirapemas and thoroughly investigate all allegations of threats and the destruction of property, bringing those responsible to justice
- Urging the authorities to investigate thoroughly the threats against Zé Patrício, and provide him with full protection according to his wishes;
- Calling on the authorities to uphold the rights of all quilombo communities so as to promote their effective and long-term security.

### PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 2 OCTOBER 2012 TO:

Federal Human Rights Secretary  
Exma. Secretária Especial  
Maria do Rosário Nunes  
SCS Bloco B, Quadra 09, Lote C,  
Ed. Parque da Cidade, Corporate,  
Torre A, 10º Andar CEP: 70308-200  
Brasília/DF  
Brazil.  
Fax: + 55 61 2025 9414

**Salutation: Dear Secretary/ Exmo. Sr. Secretário**

Governor of Maranhão  
Exma. Sra Governadora Roseana  
Sarney  
Palácio dos Leões - Av. Dom Pedro II,  
s/nº Centro 65.010-904 - São Luís/MA,  
Brazil  
Fax: + 55 98 2108 9252/9084

**Salutation: Dear Governor/ Exma. Sra Governadora**

### And copies to:

Pastoral Land Commission  
Comissão Pastoral da Terra - Maranhão  
Rua do Sol, nº 457, Centro  
CEP 65020-590,  
São Luís – MA,  
Brazil

**Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:**

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Quilombos were first established at the end of the 16th century in remote rural areas in Brazil, by escaped and freed slaves that resisted slavery. The 1988 Brazilian Constitution (Articles. 215 and 216) acknowledges the right of descendant communities to the lands historically occupied by quilombos. In particular, Article 68 of the Transitory Dispositions states that "Final ownership shall be recognized for the remaining members of the quilombo communities who are occupying their lands and the state shall grant them the respective land titles". (*Aos remanescentes das comunidades dos quilombos que estejam ocupando suas terras é reconhecida a propriedade definitiva, devendo o Estado emitir-lhes os títulos respectivos.*). A series of federal and state laws has been introduced to regulate how the quilombos' lands are identified and how titles are to be given to the remaining communities.

On 30 October 2010, Flaviano Pinto Neto, a leader of the Charco quilombola community, in Maranhão, was killed with seven shots to the head (see UA 244/10). Community leaders from the Salgado quilombo in Pirapemas have also been threatened, see UA: 369/11.

In addition to the national legislation, Brazil is a party to the International Labour Organization's Convention 169, the American Convention on Human Rights and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, which reaffirm the rights of Afro-descendant groups to cultural and land rights as well as the principles of non-discrimination and equality before the law.

There are over 3000 quilombo communities in Brazil. Hundreds of administrative procedures have been initiated before the National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform (INCRA) but less than 10 per cent of the communities have yet received their land titles. The Salgado community, with over 42 families, have been fighting for their land rights since 1982 and have been threatened with various eviction orders. The community have suffered numerous setbacks, due to alleged malpractice by those responsible for the demarcation process.

Name: Forty-five families from the Quilombo Pontes community in Pirapemas; Zé Patrício

Gender m/f: Both; Zé Patrício (M)

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