

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AMR 19/15/95

UA 198/95 Possible Extrajudicial Executions / Fear for safety /
Medical concern

11 August 1995

BRAZILSquatter peasants in Corumbiara, Rondônia State

A confrontation between Rondônia state military police and a group of 500 squatter peasant (*posseiro*) families is reported to have left at least 11 peasants - including two children - and two policemen dead and over 200 people wounded. The full death toll is not known, but reports indicate that it may be considerably higher. Furthermore, there is serious concern for some of the gravely wounded whose whereabouts are unknown, and other peasants who remain unaccounted for.

From 15 July families of landless peasant families began occupying an uncultivated forest area of the Santa Elina estate, in Corumbiara municipality in the interior of Rondônia state. An attempt by some 40 military police to carry out an eviction order on 19 July was unsuccessful. By 8 August some 500 peasant families - approximately 2,500 people - had camped on the estate.

On 8 August an estimated 200 heavily armed military police, reportedly accompanied by private guards from the Santa Elina estate who had previously threatened the peasants, entered the region. Negotiations for an alternative place for the families to move to were unsuccessful.

It is not clear if the police or the peasants initiated the confrontation.

At about 4am on 9 August, military police reportedly began throwing tear gas into the encampment and entered firing. The peasants were reportedly armed with farm implements and sticks, but gunshots were also reportedly fired at the police. According to survivors who escaped by throwing themselves into a river, once inside the encampment police began to fire indiscriminately with machine guns and other firearms wounding men, women and children alike.

The full toll of dead and wounded is not yet confirmed since many of the wounded fled into the surrounding forest and have scattered throughout the region. Many of the peasants remain unaccounted for. Survivors who witnessed the violence fear that those who fled may include the gravely wounded. Thirty gravely wounded peasants are being treated in hospitals in the towns of Colorado do Oeste, Cerejeiras and Vilhena. A further 100 peasants have serious injuries, and others are lightly wounded. Many of the wounds are reportedly consistent with severe beatings.

On 9 August the military police sealed off the entire area of the estate and independent access and verification was prevented. On 11 August a Ministry of Justice official, representing the National Human Rights Council, and a Parliamentary Commission of five Federal Congressmen were due to visit the estate.

Some 300 peasants were arrested and detained in the gymnasium in the town of Colorado do Oeste, and a further 150 were held in police stations. Some 70 women and 110 children were transferred to a community centre in the town. By the evening of 10 August police reportedly began releasing detainees.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

There are frequent reports of excessive use of force, ill-treatment, torture and extrajudicial executions by Military Police in Brazil against squatter peasants trying to obtain land to farm.

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

- expressing concern at reports of the confrontation on the Santa Elina estate in Rondônia state, which resulted in the deaths of at least 11 peasants, two military policemen and wounding of scores of others;
- expressing serious concern at reports that police fired indiscriminately on men women and children inside the encampment, and severely beat members of peasant families, resulting in serious injuries and death;
- seeking a full and independent investigation, including independent forensic examination of the dead and wounded, by a separate body than the police force involved, the results of which should be made public, and those responsible for abuses brought to justice;
- urging that all possible attempts be made to locate the wounded and provide medical attention for them, and account for those peasants who are still missing and ensure their safety.

APPEALS TO:

Minister of Justice

Exmo. Sr. Ministro da Justiça

Sr. Nelson Jobim

Ministério da Justiça

Esplanada dos Ministérios, anexo II

70.064 Brasília DF, Brazil

Faxes: +55 61 226 7980 / 321 5172

Telegrams: Ministro Justica, Brasilia, Brazil

Salutation : Vossa Excelencia / Your Excellency

Attorney General

Exmo Sr. Procurador Geral da República

Dr. Geraldo Brindeiro

Procuradoria Geral da República

Ed. Sede da PGR

Av. L2 Sul - Q. 603 - lote 23

70.200 Brasília D, Brazil

Faxes: +55 61 313 5444

Telegrams: Procurado Geral da Republica, Brasilia, Brazil

Salutation : Vossa Excelencia / Your Excellency

Governor of Rondônia State

Exmo. Sr. Governador do Estado de Rondônia

Sr. Valdir Raupp

Palácio Presidente Vargas s/n

78.900 Porto Velho - RO, Brazil

Telexes: 692156 ggrobr; 692314 gecbbr

Faxes: +55 69 224 3520

Telegrams: Governador do Rondonia, Porto Velho, Brazil

Salutation : Vossa Excelencia / Your Excellency

Secretary of State for Public Security, Rondonia State

Exmo. Sr. Secretário de Segurança Pública do Estado de Rondônia

Sr. Wanderley Martins Mossini

Rua Pio XII, S/Nº,
Esplanada das Secretários
B. Pedrinhas, CP 78904-070, Porto Velho - RO, Brazil

Faxes: +55 69 224 2715

Telegrams: Secretario de Seguranca Publica, Porto Velho, Rondonia, Brazil

Salutation : Sr. Secretário de Segurança Pública

COPIES TO:

Pastoral Land Commission

Comissão Pastoral da Terra

Caixa Posta 1051, 78.900-970 Porto Velho, RO, 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 29 September 1995.