

PUBLIC

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Fear for safety

BRAZIL

Some 200 agricultural workers

Killed:

Valmir Motta de Oliveira (known as Keno) (m), community leader

The lives of around 200 agricultural workers occupying a farm near the town of Santa Teresa do Oeste in Paraná state, southern Brazil, are in imminent danger. The group was attacked by armed men on 21 October, leaving two men dead and one woman in a coma.

Early in the morning of 21 October, members of the *Via Campesina* and the *Movimento de Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* (MST), both landless workers' movements, occupied the 127-hectare farm. The land is owned by a multinational company that had used it for field trials of genetically modified crops. The use of the land is presently being contested both because it potentially contravenes an environmental zoning law and has been identified as a possible site for land reform for the settlement of landless agricultural workers.

Hours after the occupation, 40 armed men entered the farm and shot dead MST leader Valmir Motta de Oliveira (known as Keno) in the chest at point blank range. One of the armed men was also killed. Initial reports suggest he was shot accidentally by one of the other gunmen. Eight others were injured in the attack, including MST member Izabel Nascimento, who was beaten unconscious and is now in a coma in hospital, in a critical condition.

Two other MST leaders, Celso Barbosa and Célia Aparecida Lourenço, were pursued by the gunmen but managed to escape. "We are sure that they came here to kill Keno, Celinha and me," said Celso Barbosa, who added that they had received death threats and intimidation since the beginning of the year.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Human rights groups and land activists in the state of Paraná have previously suffered threats and intimidation from a number of groups formed by landowners. In a public hearing on October 18, local rights groups presented a dossier of evidence to the state human rights commission which highlighted the activities of armed men hired by landowners and agricultural companies. According to the report, they act with no legal controls or oversight, often using violent and illegal methods to forcibly evict, threaten and attack land activists.

The farm had been previously occupied by the same group for over a year, in an attempt to speed up the process of formalizing the state government's attempts to use the land for agrarian reform and environmental protection. The land is potentially environmentally sensitive because of its proximity to the Iguaçu National Park.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of the 200 landless agricultural workers at the farm near Santa Teresa do Oeste in Paraná state;
- calling on the authorities to investigate all the killings and attacks that occurred on 21 October near the town of Santa Tereza Oeste and that those found responsible be brought to justice;
- urging the authorities to take steps to ensure the security of rural leaders Celso Barbosa, Célia Aparecida Lourenço and all rural workers from Via Campesina and MST;

- calling on the authorities to thoroughly investigate all accusations of previous threats and intimidation against rural workers, and to bring those responsible to justice;
- requesting immediate investigations into patterns of human rights abuses by armed men hired by landowners in the State of Paraná.

APPEALS TO:

Governor of Paraná State

Exmo Governador do Estado do Paraná
Sr. Roberto Requião de Mello e Silva
Palácio Iguazu
Praça Nossa Senhora de Saete, s/nº, 3º andar
Centro Cívico 80.530-909
Curitiba/PR – Brasil

Fax: + 55 41 3350 2935

Salutation: Vossa Excelência/ Your Excellency

Minister of Justice

Exmo Ministro da Justiça
Sr. Tarso Genro
Esplanada dos Ministérios, Bloco "T"
70712-902 - Brasília/DF – Brasil

Fax: + 55 61 3322-6817

Salutation: Vossa Excelência/ Your Excellency

COPIES TO:

Federal Human Rights Secretary

Secretaria Especial de Direitos Humanos
Exmo. Secretário Especial
Sr. Paulo de Tarso Vannuchi
Esplanada dos Ministérios - Bloco "T" - 4º andar
70.064-900 - Brasília/DF – Brasil

Fax: + 55 61 3226 7980

Salutation: Vossa Excelência/ Your Excellency

Terra de Direitos (local NGO)

Darci Frigo
R. José Loureiro, 464, 2º and, conj. 26
80.010-907 – Curitiba/PR – Brasil

Fax: + 55 41 3232 4660

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 6 December 2007.