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Fear for safety

15 October 1998

BRAZILFrei Rodrigo de Castro Amédée Péret, APR
Marcelo Resende de Souza, APR
José Henrique de Freitas Vilela, land reform activist
Rivelino Barsanufo, land reform activist
Celio Gonçalves Leite, land reform activist
Nair [full name not available], land reform activist

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of Frei Rodrigo de Castro Amédée Péret, a Franciscan monk, and other land reform activists following a murder attempt against him by landowners on 22 September 1998. The attack occurred in the context of tension over land reform in the Santa Vitória area of Minas Gerais State.

Frei Rodrigo is coordinator of the *Animação Pastoral e Social no Meio Rural* (APR), a diocesan pastoral organization concerned with rural issues. He and the above-named were attempting to resolve a stand-off between landless families and armed landowners, who were threatening violence. The families had occupied an unproductive area of Perobas farm earlier that day. Military Police despatched to the area reportedly failed to intervene when the landowners went for reinforcements and returned with about 100 armed men, some wearing face masks.

Frei Rodrigo and the above-named were returning to the Perobas farm after the regional military police commander assured them that the police had defused the situation. Their cars were intercepted by two trucks containing armed men, including local landowners. Frei Rodrigo, Marcelo Resende and José Henrique were forced out of their cars and severely beaten. Frei Rodrigo experienced convulsions, and was helped into the back of the car. One of the attackers fired at him through the windscreen. The bullet missed him, lodging in the back seat. The attackers fled when the police arrived. Allegedly, the police delayed pursuit, and, although they later stopped one of the vehicles involved in the attack, failed to mention this in their report.

Amnesty International has received reports of several incidents in which military police have demonstrated acquiescence, even cooperation, with armed militias formed by local landowners in Santa Vitória.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Land-reform and land-related conflict have become a pressing social issue for the Brazilian government. Amnesty International takes no position on the question of land tenure or agrarian reform per se. However, it is deeply concerned at the continuing human rights violations and impunity in the context of land conflict. Landowners' militias have illegally and violently evicted landless peasants occupying idle private or public land, sometimes with the cooperation of military police.

Evictions should only be carried out by law enforcement officials with a court order. Federal legislation requires the presence of a representative of the State Prosecution Service (*Ministério Público*). This is rarely complied with.

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

- calling for protection for Frei Rodrigo de Castro Amédée Péret, Marcelo Resende, José Henrique de Freitas Vilela, Rivelino Barsanufu, Celio Gonçalves Leite and Nair following an attack on them by armed landowners in Santa Vitória, Minas Gerais state, on 22 September 1998;
- calling for a full and prompt investigation into the attack, to be carried out by a body independent of local law-enforcement officials, and for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- reminding the authorities that evictions may only be carried out by law-enforcement officials holding a court order and that representatives of the Ministério Público should always be present;
- reminding the government of Brazil of its commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in particular Article 7: "All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law."

APPEALS TO:Governor, Minas Gerais State

Exmo. Sr. Governador do Estado de Minas Gerais
 Dr. Eduardo Brandão de Azeredo
 Palácio da Liberdade
 Praça da Liberdade s/n
 30140-912 Belo Horizonte, MG, Brazil

Salutation: Sua Excelência/ Your Excellency**Faxes: +55 31 250 6059**Minas Gerais Regional Military Police Commander

Comando Geral da Policia Military de Minas Gerais
 Cel. Macio Lopes Porto
 Rua da Bahia, 2115 5 andar
 30160-012 Belo Horizonte, MG, Brazil

Salutation: Exmo.Senhor/ Dear Sir**Faxes: +55 31 201 9542**Secretary, Human Rights Secretariat

Exmo. Sr. Secretário dos Direitos Humanos
 Dr. José Gregori
 Secretário Nacional dos Direitos Humanos
 Ministério da Justiça, Esplanada dos Ministérios
 Bloco T, Anexo II, 2º Andar
 70064-900 Brasília, DF, Brazil

Faxes: +55 61 225 0440 (if voice ask for fax)**COPIES TO:**

Animação Pastoral e Social no Meio Rural (APR)
 Av, Monsenhor Eduardo, 963 sala 03
 Bairro Bom Jesus
 38406-080 Uberlandia, MG, Brazil

Faxes: +55 34 214 0845

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 26 November 1998.

"All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination
to equal protection of the law."

Article 7, Universal Declaration of Human Rights

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