

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

**AI Index: AMR 19/25/91
Distr: UA/SC**

UA 313/91

Fear of Extrajudicial Execution

20 September 1991

BRAZIL:

GUMERCINDO RODRIGUES, trade unionist

Amnesty International has learned with great concern of an attempt on the life of the trade unionist Gumercindo Rodrigues on 17 September 1991 in Rio Branco, capital of Acre State.

According to reports received by Amnesty International, Gumercindo Rodrigues was followed by a vehicle whose occupants allegedly tried unsuccessfully to kidnap him. Two men who allegedly identified themselves as police reportedly fired gunshots from the vehicle, wounding him in the stomach and the neck. Gumercindo Rodrigues was taken to a local hospital to receive immediate medical attention for his wounds. It has been reported that telephone threats against Gumercindo Rodrigues have been received at the hospital. Due to the seriousness of the injuries he is to be transferred to a hospital in Sao Paulo.

Gumercindo Rodrigues is an adviser to the National Rubber Tappers Council and the Xapuri Rural Workers Union where he worked closely with Chico Mendes, the rubbertappers' leader murdered on 22 December 1988. According to reports, a month ago Gumercindo Rodrigues' house was surrounded by local ranchers including members of the Alves family who have been repeatedly accused of acts of violence against rural workers. Darli Alves and Darci Alves were convicted of the murder of Chico Mendes in December 1990.

Reports indicate that the attempt on Gumercindo Rodrigues' life might be connected with his work with the rubber tappers who try to defend their livelihood in the Amazon against the encroachment of ranchers and timber merchants.

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety and physical integrity of Gumercindo Rodrigues and the repeated failure of the authorities to take effective action to investigate and stop the continuing threats to the lives of rubbertapper activists in Acre State.

The wave of violence against hundreds of peasants, trade union leaders and those supporting them in land disputes or in campaigning for agrarian reform, some of whom were killed during the 1980s, has continued up to the present. In spite of the notorious widespread and persistent nature of these killings, the Brazilian government has failed to take effective measures to stop them. With very few exceptions the gunmen who carried out these killings and those who contracted them have not been brought to trial. Amnesty International believes that a state of virtual impunity exists because of the frequent acquiescence of local authorities in these crimes.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Along with several other rubber tapper leaders, Gumercindo Rodrigues has received numerous death threats during the past several years as a result of his trade union activities. Threats against him intensified last year when he ran for local political office. During the past two months, two other rubber tapper leaders have also been attacked. Most recently, Gumercindo Rodrigues coordinated a successful protest action (empate) by rubber tappers defending

land from deforestation. The empate received local press attention when a rancher said that Gumercindo Rodrigues was responsible for it. His colleagues believe that the attack may have been in retaliation for his participation in this action.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters:

- expressing concern at the attempt on the life of Gumercindo Rodrigues;
- urging that Gumercindo Rodrigues be given special protection to prevent future attacks in the hospital and during his recuperation;

In appeals to the federal authorities:

- urging that the federal government give assistance to state authorities in thoroughly investigating this attack.

APPEALS TO:

1.

(Minister of Justice):

Exmo Sr Jarbas Passarinho

[Salutation: Vossa Excelência]

Ministro da Justiça

Ministério da Justiça

Esplanada dos Ministerios

Bloco 23

70.064 Brasilia DF, Brazil

Telegrams: Ministro Justica, Brasilia, Brazil

**Telexes: 611003 MNJU BR; 611088 MNJU BR;
612313 MNJU BR**

Faxes: + 55 61 321 5145; + 55 61 224 4357

2.

(Secretary of Public Security, State of Acre):

Exmo. Sr. Secretario de Segurança Pública

Estado de Acre

Sr. José Elias Chaul

[Salutation: Sr. Secretario]

Rua Quintino Bocaiúva, S/Nº

69.000 Rio Branco, AC, Brazil

Telegrams: Secretario Seguranca Publica

Rio Branco, Brazil

Telexes: 682591 SSPA BR

3.

(Superintendent of Federal Police, Acre):

Sr. Superintendente da Polícia Federal do Acre

[Salutation: Sr. Superintendente]

Superintendencia Regional

Rua Floriano Peixote 744, Centro

69.000 Rio Branco, AC, Brazil

**Telegrams: Acre Policia Superintendente, Rio Branco
AC, Brazil**

COPIES TO:

(National Council of Rubbertappers):
Conselho Nacional dos Seringueiros
Rua Alexandre Farhat, 206
Barrio José Augusto
69.900 Rio Branco, AC, Brazil

and to diplomatic representatives of Brazil in your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 1 November 1991.