

UA 213/96 Fear for safety / Possible extrajudicial executions 28 August 1996

BRAZIL Gilvam Alves da Silva

Manuel Morães de Souza

Sebastião
Valério

and 200 squatter peasant (*posseiro*) families on the São Francisco
estate

Amnesty International is deeply concerned for the safety of Gilvam Alves da Silva and some 200 squatter peasant families (*posseiros*) camped on the São Francisco estate in Pará state, northern Brazil, following the abduction and shooting of Gilvam Alves da Silva, Manuel Morães de Souza, and two other men known only as Sebastião and Valério.

The four were reportedly abducted by eight armed gunmen (*pistoleiros*) on 20 August 1996. They were taken to the estate ranch house, tied up, and repeatedly beaten and interrogated to ascertain who were the leaders of a group of peasant families encamped on the estate. On 21 August they were reportedly put in a pick-up truck and told they were being taken to the civil police station in Marabá. Some 10-20 kilometres from the estate they were made to descend from the truck, beaten and interrogated again, and then shot in the head, and their bodies dumped near the road. Manuel Morães de Souza, Sebastião and Valério were apparently killed. Gilvam Alves da Silva, however, pretended to be dead and survived. He later crawled out from under the other bodies and escaped by walking some 15 kilometres despite being wounded in the side of the head and still having his hands tied. After reaching the town of Curinópolis he was transferred to Marabá by ambulance for hospital treatment.

After this was reported to the police, they visited the São Francisco estate on 23 August where they noted the presence of a large number of armed estate employees. One body was found on the estate, and although not yet identified, is believed to be that of an estate employee who may have been killed apparently in another incident between *posseiros* and estate workers on 23 August.

On 26 August police officials accompanied Gilvam Alves to try to find the place he and his companions had been shot. However no bodies were found. As the only witness to the killings, Gilvam Alves da Silva has sought police protection. The families of the three missing men are now providing descriptions of their relatives to the police.

Some 200 peasant families have reportedly been squatting on the São Francisco estate between Eldorado de Carajás and Marabá for almost a year. In early August 1996 representatives of the local rural workers trade union and the government's land agency met with squatters' representatives to discuss the situation of the families and arranged a visit to the estate and to hold a formal meeting with the estate manager to reach a solution.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

There are frequent land occupations in Brazil by landless rural workers seeking settlement through land reform.

Whilst Amnesty International takes no position on land disputes, the organization is concerned at a pattern of impunity in Brazil for scores of killings of peasant leaders by gunmen reportedly hired by local landowners. Investigations into a number of these cases have revealed that the hired gunmen involved were in fact policemen.

Over the last year there has been an increase in conflict over land in Brazil, with frequent reports of excessive use of force, ill-treatment, torture and extrajudicial executions by military police carrying out land evictions. On 17 April 1996, 19 peasants were killed by military police clearing a demonstration of the Landless Peasants Movement on the road (PA 150) near Eldorado de Carajás, very near to where the events described above took place (see UA 107/96, AMR 19/16/96, 19 April 1996). Nine peasants and two policemen were killed on 9 August 1995 when military police evicted 500 peasant families from the Santa Elina estate in Rondônia state (see UA 198/95, AMR 19/16/95, 11 August 1995).

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

- expressing serious concern at allegations that three *posseiros* from the Fazenda São Francisco in Pará state were killed on 21 August 1996 after being abducted and beaten by armed gunmen;
- calling for a full and independent investigation into the allegations, and for further efforts to locate Manuel Morães de Souza, Sebastião and Valério, for the results to be made public, and those responsible for any human rights violations to be brought to justice;
- expressing concern for the safety of Gilvam Alves da Silva, witness to their abduction and killing and urging that all necessary steps are taken to guarantee his physical safety.
- expressing concern for the safety of members of the 200 peasant families on the São Francisco estate, and their leaders, and that the authorities take measures to secure their physical safety.

APPEALS TO:

Secretary of State for Public Security, Pará State

Exmo. Sr. Secretário de Segurança Pública do Estado de Pará
 Sr. Paulo Celso Pinheiro Sete Câmara
 Secretaria de Segurança Pública
 Rua Acipreste Manoel Teodoro, N°305
 66 023-700 Belém PA, Brazil

Faxes: +55 91 225 2644

Telegrams: Secretario de Segurança Pública, Belem, Para

Salutation: Sr. Secretário de Segurança Pública / Dear Secretary of State

Governor of Pará State

Exmo. Sr. Governador de Estado do Pará
 Sr. Almir Gabriel
 Palácio Lauro Sodré
 Praça Dom Pedro II, s/n°
 66.000 Belém PA, Brazil

Faxes: +55 91 248 0133 or 248 1575

Telegrams: Governador do Pará, Belem, Brasil

Salutation: Vossa Excelência / Your Excellency

Minister of Justice

Exmo. Sr. Ministro da Justiça do Brasil
Dr. Nelson Azevedo Jobim
Ministério da Justiça
Esplanada dos Ministérios, Bloco 23
CEP 70064-900 Brasília, DF, Brazil
Faxes: +55 61 321 5172 / 224 2448 / 322 6817 / 226 7980
Telegrams: Ministro Justica, Brasilia, Brasil
Salutation: Vossa Excelência / Your Excellency

COPIES TO:

Sociedade Paraense de Defesa dos Direitos Humanos
Núcleo Marabá
Rua 5 de Abril 498, Núcleo Pioneiro,
68500 Marabá, PA, 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 5 October 1996.