

UA 291/00 Fear for safety/ Death threats/ Extrajudicial execution

19 September 2000

BRAZIL João Vitor de Oliveira Neto]
Antonio Epitácio da Costa] Land activists
Manoel Paulo]
Josenilton Carreiro de Melo]

Roberto Costa Araújo - human rights defender with the CPT

Killed: Sandoval Alves de Lima

A land activist, one of the leaders of a group of landless families occupying an estate in northeastern Brazil, has been shot dead by a gunman closely linked to the owner of the estate. The other people named above have received repeated death threats and are believed to be on a death list.

Some 78 families are occupying the *Fazenda Antas* estate, in the municipality of Sobrado, Paraíba state. One of their leaders, Sandoval Alves de Lima, was shot dead in the street on 9 September in the neighbouring municipality of Sapé. The gunman, while escaping on horseback, shouted to bystanders that he was not finished, and that he had a death list with five more names on it - believed to be those named above. Witnesses reportedly recognised the killer as a gunman known to work for a powerful local businessmen with close links to the owner of the *Fazenda Antas*.

The Catholic Church human rights organisation *Comissão Pastoral da Terra* (CPT), Pastoral Land Commission, has repeatedly urged the state authorities to open a proper investigation into the murder. Despite the CPT providing the authorities with a list of eyewitnesses, so far no action has been taken. The killer has reportedly been seen in public in local towns with his employer, the businessman. The businessman has reportedly told people, "*Este caso não vai dar nada... É um problema pequeno*" (This case is going nowhere... it's just a little problem").

All those named above received numerous death threats before Sandoval Alves de Lima was killed, reportedly from gunmen working for the businessman and the landowner. Representatives of the CPT repeatedly denounced these threats to the state authorities. No action was taken to bring those responsible to justice or prevent the killing of Sandoval Alves de Lima.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

There are conflicts between landless peasants and large landowners throughout rural Brazil. Landless leaders are often threatened and attacked by gunmen in the pay of landowners. State authorities often fail to take action to stop these crimes or bring those responsible to justice.

Military police evicting landless peasants have often used excessive force, including extrajudicial executions and torture. In August 1995 military police and hired gunmen killed 10 landless peasants in Corumbiara, Rondônia state. In April 1996 they killed 19 members of the *Movimento Sem Terra* (MST), Landless Rural Workers Movement, in Eldorado de Carajás, Pará state. This year a number of land activists have been killed by hired gunmen in Mato Grosso do Sul and Ceará. Those responsible are almost never brought to justice.

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 taking place during land conflicts, and the impunity enjoyed by those responsible.

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

- expressing grave concern at the killing of Sandoval Alves de Lima on 9 September, by a gunman reportedly working for the owner of Fazenda Antas, in Sobado municipality, Paraíba state;
- expressing grave concern at the death threats against João Vitor de Oliveira Neto, Antonio Epitácio da Costa, Manoel_ Paulo, Josenilton Carreiro de Melo and Roberto Costa Araújo, whose names are also believed to feature on a death-list used by the gunman;
- calling for immediate action to protect them, in accordance with their own wishes;
- urging the authorities to initiate a swift and effective investigation into the murder of Sandoval Alves de Lima and the threats against the others named above, to publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- reminding the authorities that failure to take action against those responsible may be considered as connivance in these crimes and may lead to further human rights violations.

APPEALS TO:

Governor of Paraíba state

Dr. José Targino Maranhao
Governador do Estado da Paraíba
Palácio da Redenção
Praça João Pessoa, Centro
58000 - João Pessoa - PB - Brazil

Salutation: Exmo Sr. Governador/Dear Governor

Fax: + 55 83 222 3857

Paraíba State Secretary for Public Security

Dr Glaberto Bezerra
Secretário da Segurança Pública
Avenida Hilton Souto Mayor, s/nº
Mangabeira I
58055-460 - João Pessoa - PB - Brazil

Salutation: Exmo Sr. Secretário / Dear Secretary

Fax: + 55 83 238 5583

Minister of Justice

Exmo. Sr. Ministro da Justiça do Brasil
Dr. José Gregori
Ministério da Justiça
Esplanada dos Ministérios, Bloco 23
70064-900 - Brasília - DF - Brazil

Salutation: Vossa Excelência/Your Excellency

Fax: + 55 61 224 2448/322 6817

COPIES TO:

Comissão Pastoral da Terra/Nordeste (CPT), Pastoral Land Commission
Rua Esperanto, 490, Ilha do Leite,
50050-390 - Recife - PE - 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 1 November 2000.