

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 19/23/99

UA 213/99

Fear for Safety/Death threats

20 August 1999

BRAZIL

Valdecir Nicásio Lima, lawyer

Amnesty International is seriously concerned for the safety of Valdecir Nicásio Lima, a lawyer working on human rights issues in the state of Acre, who has recently received death threats. Amnesty International believes that he is being targeted because he is involved in investigations into the reported criminal activities of a federal congressman from Acre who has been linked to a death squad operating in the state.

At the beginning of August 1999 Valdecir Nicásio Lima spoke about the investigations in an interview on a popular national TV show. On the evening show was transmitted four heavily armed men went to the house of a friend of his and said that they were going to shoot Valdecir. Valdecir Nicásio Lima has been told by the *Corregedoria Geral de Polícia*, the Police Disciplinary Board in Acre, that his safety cannot be guaranteed in the state.

According to a report published by the Acre State Human Rights Council (a joint government and civil society body) in January this year, the federal congressman - a former military police colonel - was a key member of a death squad that has been responsible for the killings of at least 30 people in Rio Branco, the state capital. Killings carried out by the death squad are characterised by the extremely mutilated condition in which victims' bodies are found. The death squad is also alleged to control arms and drugs trafficking in the state.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In May 1999 the Brazilian parliament set up a commission to investigate death squads and drug trafficking in Acre. Valdecir Nicásio Lima has been asked to testify before this commission. At the beginning of August the *Comissão de Constituição e Justiça da Câmara dos Deputados*, Parliamentary Constitutional Committee for Justice, unanimously approved proposals to begin proceedings to strip the federal congressman of his political office and allow him to face criminal prosecution. Unless parliamentary authorization to prosecute is given, state and federal members of congress enjoy criminal immunity in Brazil.

Human rights defenders in Brazil are vulnerable to death threats, intimidation, and attacks by police, death squads and hired gunmen who operate with official acquiescence. The Human Rights Commission of the Brazilian federal Chamber of Deputies is currently monitoring death squad activity in at least nine of Brazil's 26 states.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Valdecir Nicásio Lima, who has been subjected to death threats;
- urging that the authorities take all appropriate measures to guarantee his safety;
- noting that the death threats appear to be linked to his involvement in investigations into the alleged criminal activities of an Acre federal congressman;
- calling for a full, prompt and impartial investigation into the reported links between the federal congressman and death squad activity in Acre.

APPEALS TO:

Exmo. Sr. Governador do
Estado de Acre
Sr. Jorge Ney Viana Macedo Neves
Avenida Brasil No 297
69900-100 Rio Branco AC

Brazil

Telegrams: Governador do Acre, Rio Branco, Acre, Brazil

Fax: + 55 68 223 8355 (When the call is answered, say "Fax, por favor", and wait for the fax signal)

Salutation: Vossa Excelência / Your Excellency

Exmo. Sr Secretário de Estado dos Direitos Humanos

Sr. José Gregori

Secretaria de Estado dos Direitos Humanos_

Ministério da Justiça_

Esplanada dos Ministérios,

Bloco T, Ed Sede, Sala 420_

70064-901 Brasília DF

Brazil

Telegrams: Secretaria de Estado dos Direitos Humanos,
Brasília, DF, Brazil

Fax: + 55 61 223 2260_

Salutation: Exmo. Sr./ Dear Sir

Sra. Secretária de Justiça e Segurança Pública do Estado de Acre,

Sra Maria Salete da Costa Maia

Prédio Banacre, (3 andar)

Rua Marechal Deodoro

69900-000 Rio Branco AC

Brazil

Telegrams: Secretária de Justiça e Segurança Pública do Acre, Rio Branco,
Acre, Brazil

Fax: + 55 68 224 1183 (When the call is answered, say "Fax, por favor", and wait for the fax signal)

Salutation: Exmo. Sra. / Dear Madam

COPIES TO:

Centro de Defesa dos Direitos Humanos da Diocese do Rio Branco

Praça do Catedral s/nº, Centro

66990-150 Rio Branco Acre Brazil

Secretária da Comissão de Constituição e Justiça da Câmara dos Deputados

Câmara dos Deputados

Anexo 2, Sala T 21

70160-900 Brasília DF

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 October 1999.