

UA 284/96

Fear for safety

4 December 1996

BRAZILKatithaurlu Indians**Ariovaldo José dos Santos, FUNAI field worker
Sebastião Moreira, CIMI Coordinator, Mato Grosso**

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of a group of 76 Katithaurlu Indians, a sub-group of the Nambikwara Indians, after an attack on their village in Mato Grosso state by a group of loggers on 16 November 1996. Although the Indians were able to recognise and name some of the men involved in the attack, the loggers are still at liberty in the area, and Amnesty International has received reports that the community has been threatened with further violence.

Two men who have been monitoring the situation in the Sararé indigenous lands (home to the Nambikwara Indians), and calling for the withdrawal of land invaders from the area (see below), are also feared to be at risk. Ariovaldo José dos Santos, field worker and district supervisor for the Brazilian government's indigenous agency, FUNAI, has received death threats. In an anonymous telephone call on 30 November he was told that he would be killed on the morning of 8 December. He has asked for police protection, but has not so far received any. Sebastião Moreira, of the Catholic Church's indigenous rights body, CIMI, also received intimidating telephone calls on the same afternoon.

A team of doctors and field workers who were able to reach the Katithaurlu village on 19 November found evidence that Indians had been tied up and beaten. Two adults had wounds to the head, and one of their leaders, Américo, had suffered a serious wound to his mouth and lower jaw. The doctors reported on 14 cases where there were clear signs of injury. After assaulting the Indians, the loggers looted the village, stealing money, guns and vehicles, and damaging huts, a school and a medical post.

The federal authorities in Brazil are legally responsible for protecting Indians. Despite the very serious incident on 16 November, and repeated promises of protection, as far as Amnesty International is aware, no concrete measures have yet been taken.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Sararé and Vale do Guaporé indigenous reserves, which are home to the Nambikwara Indians, have been invaded by about 8,000 miners and loggers. Indigenous communities and support groups have been calling for their withdrawal since the early 1980s. Indigenous communities in Brazil are vulnerable to human rights abuses carried out by miners, loggers and other interest groups coveting indigenous lands and the resources on them, who frequently act with official acquiescence or collusion. Impunity for human rights abuses against indigenous people is almost universal.

Under Brazil's 1988 Constitution all other titles to indigenous land are considered null and void. Nevertheless, in January 1996 the Brazilian Federal Government issued Decree 1775/96 providing procedures for administrative challenges by non-indigenous claimants to indigenous areas.

Amnesty International takes no position on land disputes, but has expressed concern that the uncertainty created by the Decree might pave the way to violent incursions on indigenous lands, which in the past has led to assaults, selective killings and massacres of indigenous communities. Amnesty International has

called upon the government of Brazil to take concrete steps to protect the physical integrity of indigenous communities, especially in the light of the Decree. However, large scale invasions such as of the Yanomami Reserve in Roraima have been allowed to become established before government action has been taken.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Katithauru Indians in the Sararé reserve, Mato Grosso state, following an attack on their village on 16 November 1996 in which at least 14 people were assaulted;
- expressing concern for the safety of Ariovaldo José dos Santos and Sebastião Moreira following telephone threats against them;
- urging the Federal Government of Brazil to take immediate steps to ensure the safety of the Katithauru, Ariovaldo José dos Santos and Sebastião Moreira;
- calling on the Federal Government of Brazil to provide any necessary medical treatment for Katithauru Indians injured in the attack;
- calling on the Federal Government of Brazil to initiate an immediate inquiry into the attack and threats and to bring those responsible to justice.

APPEALS TO:

Minister of Justice

Exmo. Sr. Ministro da Justiça
do Brasil
Dr. Nelson Azevedo Jobim
Ministério da Justiça
Esplanada dos Ministérios, Bloco 23
Brasília, DF
CEP 70064-900 Brazil

Telegrams: Ministro Justiça, Brasília, Brazil

Fax: +55 61 321 5172/ 322 6817 / 226 7980

Salutation: Vossa Excelência/ Your Excellency

President of FUNAI (Government Indigenous Agency)

Exmo. Presidente da FUNAI
Sr. Júlio Gaiger
SETS
Quadra 702/902
Edifício LEX, 3º andar, Bloco A
CEP 70340-904 Brasília DF

Telegrams: Presidente FUNAI, Brasília, Brazil

Fax: +55 61 226 8782

Salutation: Exmo. Senhor/ Dear Sir

COPIES TO:

State Governor, Mato Grosso

Exmo. Sr. Governador do Estado de Mato Grosso
Sr. Dante de Oliveira
Palácio Paiaguás
Centro Político Administrativo
Cuiabá MT
CEP 78050-970 Brazil

Fax: +55 65 644 2205

Conselho Missionário Indígenista - CIMI (Non-governmental organization)

Secretariado Nacional
SDS - Edifício Venâncio III -Salas 309/314
70393-900 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 20 January 1997.