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BRAZIL: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL ADOPTS RUBBER TAPPERS' LEADER  
ANTÔNIO MACEDO AS FIRST PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE FOR OVER A DECADE.

Amnesty International is calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Antônio Batisda De Macedo -- a rubber tappers' leader arrested last week and the first prisoner of conscience adopted in Brazil for over a decade.

"Antônio Macedo's detention appears to be part of long standing pattern of intimidation and threats of rubber tappers in Brazil which first captured international attention seven years ago with the assassination of trade union leader Chico Mendes," Amnesty International said today.

"We believe Antônio Macedo is imprisoned solely for his peaceful activities in promoting rubber tappers associations and co-operatives in the region and that the case appears to have been brought against him to deter these labour and environmental activities."

Antônio Macedo was arrested on 20 September 1995 in Brazil's western Amazonian state of Acre, and has begun serving a 16-month prison sentence for having "incited rubber tappers to disobey an eviction order" in June 1991. Antonio Macedo claims he was outside Brazil in the United States at the time of the incident. Another rubber tappers' leader, Damião Gonçalves da Silva, has been summoned to appear in court in connection with the same case and may face similar imprisonment.

Both men were sentenced in June 1992 and in June 1995 their appeal against their conviction was denied. Antonio Macedo was arrested straight after a sentencing hearing -- after he protested his innocence and refused to sign a legal undertaking to make monthly appearances in court and do compulsory community service for two years. He was transferred the next day to a penal colony in Cruzeiro do Sul.

The charges against Antônio Macedo and Damião Goncalvez da Silva were originally brought for their involvement in an incident in June 1991 in which rubber tappers from the 29-year-old community of Riozinho Cruzeiro do Vale failed to obey an eviction order issued by the courts. No violence was reportedly used by the rubber tappers, who simply refused to move, using a traditional civil disobedience technique known as the *empate*, or check-mate.

Antônio Macedo claims he was in the United States at the time of the *empate*, did not know about it, and had not visited the community since the Rubber Tappers' Association had been set up there. Since the rubber and timber company bringing the eviction had no legal title to the land in question, the company later abandoned its claim, and the rubber tappers continue to work the rubber trails there.

BACKGROUND

Antônio Macedo is a longstanding campaigner for the rights of rubber tappers and indigenous people in the Alto Juruá region of Acre state. He was an associate of Chico Mendes and was coordinator, until early 1993, of the National Rubber Tappers' *Council Conselho Nacional*

*dos Seringeiros* (CNS), in the Alto Juruá region of Acre state . He is currently an adviser on the commercialization of forest products of rubber tappers and indigenous communities.

Antônio Macedo's campaigning contributed to the setting up of the official 500 square kilometre Alto Juruá Extractive Reserve and the demarcation of indigenous areas in the state of Acre. This, together with his promotion of rubber tappers' associations and co-operatives, has earned him the wrath of powerful interests in the state of Acre.

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