

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Further information on UA 119/91 (AMR 19/10/91, 2 April 1991) - Fear of Extrajudicial Execution/Death Threats

BRAZIL: José ALVES DE SOUZA
Antonio FERNANDES PEREIRA
Isaias MENDOÇA ARAUJO
(all members of rural worker's unions)

Amnesty International has learned with concern of a third attempt on the life of José Alves de Souza, member of the Rural Workers Union of Sitio Novo, Sindicato de Trabalhadores Rurais de Sitio Novo, in the region known as Bico do Papagaio (Parrot's Beak), Tocantins, Brazil.

According to the information received by Amnesty International, on 10 April 1992 at about 11 a.m. José Alves de Souza was returning from his plot in the "São Jorge-Sucavo" settlement, near Sitio Novo, in the company of Antonio Fernandes Pereira when he was shot by an unknown gunman. José Alves de Souza received extensive gunshot wounds in the neck and chest and was taken to hospital in the nearby town of Imperatriz where he is reportedly receiving medical attention.

This is the third attempt on the life of José Alves de Souza. The first took place on 21 October 1985 and the second on 7 March 1991. After the second attempt in 1991, José Alves de Souza together with Antonio Fernandes Pereira and Isaias Mendonça Araujo, were placed under police protection, all of them rural trade unionists under death threats. In March 1991, when the president of the Rural Workers Union of Sitio Novo reported the second attempt against the life of José Alves de Souza, the local police delegate allegedly told him that they should beware because José Alves de Souza, Antonio Fernandes Pereira and Isaias Mendonça Araujo were on a death list. The death threats against them are believed to have been made by local landowners, or agents acting on their behalf, in the context of longstanding land disputes. No one has been detained in relation to the threats and attempts.

In August 1991, in reply to letters of concern from Amnesty International members, Myriam Bréa Honorato de Souza, Coordinator General of the Council for the Defence of Human Rights of the Minister of Justice, Coordenadora-Geral do Conselho de Defesa dos Direitos da Pessoa Humana do Ministério de Justiça, stated that police protection to the three trade unionists had been withdrawn allegedly because the persons under protection considered it unnecessary. Furthermore, the Coordinator General of the Council for the Defence of Human Rights claimed that there were no land conflicts in the region and that the threats and attempts were the result of personal feuds.

The "São Jorge-Sucavo" settlement is part of a larger estate partially expropriated by the Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária (INCRA), National Institute of Settlements and Agrarian Reform. Local trade unionists claim that tensions between settlers and landowners in the region are high and that land disputes between settlers and neighbouring landowners are aggravated by the lack of clear demarcation of land boundaries.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Parrots' Beak, in the North of Brazil, has one of the worst records of rural violence in the whole of Brazil. While Amnesty International takes no position on competing

claims in land conflicts, it is concerned that gunmen, allegedly acting on behalf of landowners, have carried out intimidation and killings of peasants, their leaders and their advisers with impunity. The Brazilian authorities at every level have, in most cases, failed to take effective action to prevent or investigate the killings or to bring those responsible to justice.

Amnesty International considers that persistent failure to prosecute the perpetrators of such abuses may be evidence of acquiescence in the crimes by the state authorities concerned, and may encourage them to be repeated.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes:

- expressing concern at the attempted murder of José Alves de Souza and at death threats made against him and other members of rural workers' unions, mentioning Antonio Fernandes Pereira, Isaias Mendoça Araujo in your appeals;
- urging that an immediate and effective inquiry be carried out into the shooting of José Alves de Souza, and that those found responsible be brought to justice;
- requesting that immediate steps be taken to ensure the safety of José Alves de Souza, Antonio Fernandes Pereira and Isaias Mendoça Araujo.

APPEALS TO:

1. Minister of Justice:

Sr Celio Borja
Ministro da Justiça
Ministério da Justiça
Esplanada dos Ministerios
Bloco 23
70.064 Brasilia DF, Brazil
Telegrams: Ministro Justica, Brasilia, Brazil
Telexes: 611003 MNJU BR, 611088 MNJU BR; 612313 MNJU BR
Faxes: + 55 61 224 4357
[Salutation: Sr Ministro de Justiça / Dear Minister]

2. State Governor:

Exmo Sr. Governador do Estado do Tocantins
Sr Moisés Avelino
Campos Palacio de Araguaia
77.560 Miracema de Tocantins, Brazil
Telegrams: Governador Tocantins, Miracema de Tocantins, Brazil
Telexes: 618565 TOSV BR; 618569 TOSV BR; 618570 TOSV BR
Faxes: + 55 63 862 1155
[Salutation: Vossa Excelência / Your Excellency]

3. State Secretary of Public Security:

Sr Secretário de Segurança Pública
Sr Julho Resplande Arauno
Secretaria de Segurança Publica
77000 Palmas-To, Brazil
Telegrams: Secretario Seguranca Publica, Palmas-To, Brazil
Telexes: 682591 SSPA BR
[Salutation: Sr. Secretário / Dear Sir]

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

Pastoral Land Commission:
Comissão Pastoral da Terra
Araguaia-Tocantins
Rua Juscelino Kubitschek (rua 5) n. 634
Caixa Postal 134
Curupi
CEP 77.400 Tocantins
Brazil

and to diplomatic representatives of Brazil in your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 28 May 1992.