

# URGENT ACTION

## PROTECT SMALLHOLDERS FROM VIOLENCE

**Hired gunmen have fired shots over two communities of rural workers in the state of Tocantins, northern Brazil. Five community leaders have been “marked down for death”. There is a long-running land dispute in the area between local farmers and smallholders, who are fighting for land reform.**

Around 40 families in the settlements of Assentamento Santo Antônio Bom Sossego and Acampamento Vitória, in the municipality of Palmeirante, are being threatened repeatedly by eight gunmen hired by a local farmer. On the night of 6 June, the gunmen fired shots over the encampment. On 4 June, gunmen were overheard arguing about whether to carry out an execution. On 29 May one gunman told a resident: *Lá vai morrer gente* (people are going to die there). The rural workers have also complained of men with torches walking around the perimeter of the settlements. Five community members are said to be on a hit-list of people targeted by the gunmen.

The threats have been constant since last October. On 3 October gunmen burnt down several shacks in the Assentamento Santo Antônio Bom Sossego. On 16 October, rural worker Gabriel Vicente was shot dead. Those working for the regional office of a national NGO working on land issues, the Catholic Land Commission (*Comissão Pastoral da Terra*, CPT) have received a series of death threats for their support for these communities.

The Assentamento Santo Antônio Bom Sossego was created in 2003 by the federal body responsible for land reform, the *Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária* (INCRA); landless workers settled the Vitória encampment nearby. In 2005, farmers claimed land in the area and began harassing these communities. Last year illegal loggers moved into the region.

Despite a series of complaints, police have not carried out adequate investigations into the threats. In a meeting involving federal prosecutors, INCRA, the CPT and community members, it was agreed that the farmers should be asked to leave the area and ten further families of smallholders should be resettled there, but these measures have not been implemented.

### PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Portuguese, English or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of the 40 families in the Assentamento Santo Antônio Bom Sossego and the Acampamento Vitória in the municipality of Palmeirante, who are being subjected to constant threats;
- calling on the authorities to investigate all acts of violence and intimidation against these communities and bring those responsible to justice;
- calling on them to complete the land reform process in the region in order to bring long-term security to these communities.

### PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 19 JULY 2011 TO:

Secretary of Public Security of  
Tocantins State

Exmo. Sr. Secretário de Estado  
João Costa Ribeiro Filho  
Palácio Araguaia - Pç. dos Girassóis,  
s/nº Marco Central  
77.001-900 - Palmas/TO  
Brasil

Fax: +55 63 3218 6800

Salutation: *Vossa Excelência*/

**Your Excellency**

Federal Human Rights Secretary

Exma Sra. Ministra Maria do Rosário  
Setor Comercial Sul - B, Quadra 9, Lote  
C, Edifício Parque Cidade Corporate,  
Torre "A", 10º andar,  
Brasília, Distrito Federal, Brasil  
CEP: 70308-200

Fax: +55 61 2025 9414

Salutation: *Vossa Excelência*/

**And copies to:**

Comissão Pastoral da Terra - Tocantins  
Rua Porto Alegre, 446,  
Bairro São João, caixa postal: 50 - CEP:  
77.807-070 - Araguaína-to.

Fax: +55 62 4008 6405

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

According to the Catholic Land Commission (*Comissão Pastoral da Terra, CPT*) land disputes have led to over a thousand murders since the 1970s. Very few of these cases have been successfully prosecuted. Several hundred rural activists are believed to be in grave danger for their work.

Frontier areas where illegal loggers and ranchers operate in the north of the country, including in Tocantins state, have a history of rural conflict and violence. The lack of effective state presence in these areas, and a lack of political will to intervene, has meant that rural elites have been able to use force with impunity against environmental and land activists.

Impunity remains a key obstacle. According to the CPT, over 1,500 have been killed in rural violence since 1985, but less than 100 people have been convicted. And only one person who ordered a killing is now behind bars – Vitalmiro Bastos de Moura, for ordering the killing of a nun, Sister Dorothy. Over 1,800 rural activists have received death threats over the past decade; of these 42 have been killed, with a further 30 suffering attempted homicides.

Over the past month, several people have been killed in attacks that appear to be targeting social and human rights activists in neighbouring Pará state and in Rondônia state.

Conservationist José Cláudio Ribeiro da Silva and his wife Maria do Espírito Santo were ambushed and shot dead near their home in Nova Ipixuna in Pará on 24 May. For years, they had fought against deforestation in the rainforest caused by logging and other businesses. A man believed to have witnessed their murder, Erenildo Silveira dos Santos, was killed four days later.

Land reformer Adelino Ramos died on 27 May after being shot six times while on the way to a market with his wife and children. He had long protested about the activities of illegal loggers in Rondônia.

The latest killings came as the Brazilian Congress approved alterations to Brazil's environmental protection laws, seen by many as weakening current protections and placing rural activists at further risk of violence.

UA: 168/11 Index: AMR 19/009/2011 Issue Date: 07 June 2011

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