

2007

22 August

UA 218/07 Fear for safety

BRAZIL Family members and neighbours of Aurina Rodrigues Santana, Rodson da Silva
Rodrigues and Paulo Rodrigo Rodrigues Santana Braga

Aurina Rodrigues Santana, her husband Rodson da Silva Rodrigues and her son Paulo Rodrigo Rodrigues Santana Braga were shot dead on 14 August while they slept in their house in the Calabatório district of Salvador in Bahia state. It is feared that their three other daughters, and neighbours who witnessed the attack, are in danger.

The attack is widely believed to have been revenge after the family reported that 19-year-old Paulo and his 13-year-old sister had been tortured by four military police officers. Numerous sachets of drugs were found close to their bodies, though neighbours and lawyers representing the family believe these were left by the killers to suggest they had been killed in a dispute between drug gangs.

Two of Aurina's daughters, aged eight and 15, testified that several masked men had come into the house during the night and executed their family while they slept. The two girls, and their 13-year-old sister, who was not present during the shootings, have gone into hiding, as have a number of neighbours, fearing further attacks.

On 21 May, four military police officers had gone into the family's house, supposedly searching for drugs and guns. They punched and kicked Paulo and his 13-year-old sister, and demanded they deliver what they were looking for. The police put plastic bags over their heads in an attempt to asphyxiate them and poured hot oil over Paulo's head. They later stated that the police had threatened to kill them if they reported what had happened. Neighbours described how the police officers were not wearing their identity badges though they did record the licence plate of the patrol car. They also claimed the officers had threatened them as they left.

Aurina, an activist with the homeless rights movement *Movimento Sem Teto*, immediately reported this to the state human rights commission. The family, who denied any involvement with criminal activity, believed the attack was a response to a request Paulo had made to a neighbour to pay him R\$40 (c. US\$20) he owed him. According to local press reports the officer commanding the local military police battalion dismissed these allegations, saying the officers had been there on official duty, though he recognised their failure to bring a suspect into the police station for questioning contravened regulations and said an investigation would be initiated.

Lawyers working for an NGO that provides legal representation for children and adolescents, *CEDECA Yves de Roussan*, who are representing the family, told Amnesty International that the internal investigation by the military police into the torture allegations was severely flawed. They stressed that statements made by the commanding officer of the military police in the region, dismissing the allegations of torture, had severely undermined this process. Investigations headed by the civil police into the killing of three of the family have already been hampered as witnesses have been reluctant to come forward.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In May 2006 Amnesty International visited several socially deprived communities on the outskirts of Salvador, with members of *CEDECA Yves de Roussan* and other human rights organisations. In meetings with residents Amnesty International received consistent reports of police violence and discrimination as well as several killings which appeared to be the work of "death squads". In meetings with the state authorities Amnesty International was informed that the then government recognised the existence of "death squads", in which serving and former police officers were involved, and that a special unit to investigate these had been set up. However, Amnesty International was later told that many of the extrajudicial executions and other human rights violations involving police officers or suspected "death squad" activity ended in impunity.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Portuguese or your own language:

- urging the authorities to take steps to ensure the security of the surviving members of Aurina Rodrigues Santana's family, and their neighbours, in accordance with their wishes;
- calling on the authorities to ensure the civil police investigation into the killings is prompt, transparent and impartial, that all witnesses are given full protection and that those responsible are brought to justice;
- requesting that the police officers under investigation for alleged torture be suspended from active duty during the investigation and that any police officers suspected of involvement in the killings are suspended from active duty

during the investigation;

- reminding the authorities of their obligations under article 12 of the Convention against Torture, that all investigations should be prompt and impartial, and expressing concern that passing the internal investigation by the military police to the military judicial system does not meet these obligations;
- asking that lawyers representing the family be kept informed of the progress of both investigations.

APPEALS TO:

State Secretary of Public Security

Exmo Sr Paulo Fernando Bezerra
Secretario De Estado Da Segurança Pública
Centro Administrativo da Bahia, 4ª Avenida, 430
41745-002 – Salvador / BA, Brazil

Fax: +55 71 3115 1823

Salutation: Exmo Sr Secretario/Dear Mr Secretary

State Public Prosecutor's Office

Procurador Geral de Justiça
Exmo Dr Lidivaldo Reaiche Raimundo Britto
Av. Joana Angelica, 1312 - 3º andar - Nazaré
40.050-001 - Salvador/BA, Brazil

Fax: +55 71 3103-6587

Salutation: Exmo. Sr Procurador Geral de Justiça/Dear Attorney General

Federal Human Rights Secretary

Secretaria Especial de Direitos Humanos
Exmo. Secretário Especial
Sr. Paulo de Tarso Vannuchi
Esplanada dos Ministérios - Bloco "T" - 4º andar, 70.064-900 - Brasília/DF – Brasil

Fax: +55 61 3226 7980

Salutation: Exmo Sr Secretario/Dear Mr Secretary

COPIES TO:

CEDECA-BA
Rua Conceição da Praia nº32
40015-250 Salvador / BA, 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 3 October 2007.
