

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Death Threats

25 January 1991

BRAZIL:

**João Lucas da Silva,
Cícero da Silva,
José Cícero da Silva,
Maria Aparecida Pedrosa.**

Amnesty international is concerned for the safety of João Lucas da Silva, Cícero da Silva and José Cícero da Silva, leaders of the Rural Workers Union of Palmares, Pernambuco, Brazil, and of Maria Aparecida Pedrosa, legal advisor to the same union.

On 13 December, at the time when the trial of the killers of the rubber tapper leader Chico Mendes was taking place, another rural workers union leader was killed. He was José Hélio da Silva, advisor to the Rural Workers Union of Palmares, a rural township in the cane-growing region of the north-eastern state of Pernambuco (Brazil: Chico Mendez, Two Years After, AI Index: AMR 19/36/90 PABRAN 06/90, 21 December). José Hélio da Silva was killed by unknown gunmen while travelling on the BR-101 highway between Palmares and Joaquim Nabuco. In the same incident the union's treasurer, José Cícero Da Silva (no relation) was also wounded. He is still recovering from his wounds.

According to a report by the Comissão Pastoral da Terra, Pastoral Land Commission, on 9 May 1990, the union president, João Lucas da Silva, received an anonymous letter, threatening José Hélio da Silva with the same fate as Chico Mendes if he carried on his public campaign on behalf of the union.

Since the killing of José Hélio da Silva, other Palmares leaders have reported receiving repeated threats and harassment. José Hélio da Silva's widow, Maria Aparecida Pedrosa, also a legal adviser to the Palmares union, was granted police protection and temporarily left the township for her own security. Cícero da Silva, José Hélio da Silva's brother and a driver for the union, and the union's president, João Lucas da Silva (no relation) reported that they have also received death threats. The situation remains very tense in Palmares and neighbouring areas, like Maraiial, where union leaders also reported receiving death threats. Amnesty International is concerned that no effective measures appear to have been taken to prevent killings such as that of José Hélio da Silva and to bring to justice those responsible for past crimes.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Palmares Rural Workers Union is a member of the Federation of Agricultural Workers of Pernambuco, Federação dos Trabalhadores na Agricultura em Pernambuco, (FETAPE) which reportedly represents 250,000 rural workers in the state. Land disputes between peasant smallholders and landowners and conflicts over rural workers' conditions are an endemic source of violence in Brazil. Over 1,000 peasants and their supporters are reported to have been killed since 1980, the vast majority of them by hired gunmen, known as pistoleiros, employed by landowners or aspiring landowners (See: Amnesty International: "Brazil: Authorised Violence

in Rural Areas" AI Index: AMR/19/16/88, September 1988). According to FETAPE, in the last seven years, 45 unionists have been murdered in the state of Pernambuco. Very rarely have the killers been detained or brought to justice.

Harassment, threats and killings are often aimed at union advisers and campaigners for workers' rights, like José Hélio da Silva. As a result, another union adviser, José Patrocínio dos Santos, a priest and lawyer, left Brazil and is now living abroad. Attempts against union leaders' lives often increase at times of

political transition, as is the case in Pernambuco, where a new governor has been elected but will not take office until March.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams/telexes/faxes/airmail letters:

- expressing concern at the reported death threats to João Lucas da Silva, Cícero da Silva, José Cícero da Silva and Maria Aparecida Pedrosa;

- welcoming the protection granted to Maria Aparecida Pedrosa and urging that the threatened union leaders receive special protection to prevent their being killed;

- requesting information about the progress of the investigation of the killing of José Hélio da Silva near Joaquim Nabuco on 13 December 1990.

APPEALS TO:

Exmo Sr Jarbas Passarinho **(Minister of Justice)**
 Ministro da Justica
 Esplanada dos Ministerios
 70064 Brasilia,DF, Brazil.

Telegrams: Ministro Justica, Brasilia, Brazil

Telexes: 611003 MNJU BR, 611088 MNJU BR or 612313 MNJU BR

Faxes: + 55 61 224 4357

Sr. Governador do Estado de Pernambuco **(State Governor of Pernambuco)**
 Sr. Carlos Wilson Rocha de Queiroz Campos
 Palácio Campo das Princesas
 Praça da República
 50.000 Recife,
 Pernambuco,PE, Brazil
Telegrams: Governador Estado Pernambuco, Recife, Pernambuco, Brazil

Sr. Secretario de Seguranca Pública **(Public Security Chief)**
 Estado de Pernambuco
 Sr. João de Andrade Arraes
 Rua Aurora 487
 Boa Vista
 50.000 Recife,
 Pernambuco, PE, Brazil
Telegrams: Secretario Seguranca Publica Estado Pernambuco, Recife, Pernambuco, Brazil

COPIES TO:

Comissão Pastoral da Terra Nordeste II
 Rua Gervásio Pires 435

Bõa Vista,
50050 Recife,
Pernambuco, PE, Brazil
Faxes: + 81 421 21 10

Federaçao dos Trabalhadores
na Agricultura em Pernambuco (FETAPE)
Rua Gervasio Pires 876
Bõa Vista
50050 Recife,
Pernambuco,PE, Brazil.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat or your section office if sending appeals after 8 March 1991.