

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 19/02/00

UA 14/00

Fear for safety / Medical concern

20 January 2000

BRAZIL

Guarani-Nhandeva indigenous community

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Gunmen apparently hired by local landowners have reportedly attacked an indigenous community in Mato Grosso do Sul state, in an attempt to force them out of an area due to be set aside as indigenous land. Amnesty International fears that the community may face further attacks from landowners, who blocked access to and from the village for several days afterwards. The attack went ahead with the apparent acquiescence of the local authorities.

In the early hours of 14 January 2000 up to 50 heavily armed gunmen (*pistoleiros*) in military uniforms converged on the village of Potrero Guaçu, in Paranhos municipality, burning most of the 35 houses and many of the villagers' belongings. They reportedly raped several women in front of their husbands and fathers, and beat other villagers including a child. Thirty of the villagers, members of the Guarani-Nhandeva indigenous community, were then reportedly forced onto a truck and taken to other indigenous communities, in an attempt to clear them off the land. A number of others are still unaccounted for and there are fears they have "disappeared".

That afternoon Federal Police officers came to the village and arrested five of the gunmen, and confiscated a number of high calibre weapons. Local landowners later blocked all access to Potrero Guaçu, cutting off medical support and food supplies to the community, and obstructing the police from completing a full investigation. The road has since been cleared by the Federal Police.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The village of Potrero Guaçu is in the process of being demarcated as indigenous land. Disputes over land rights can take years for the federal authorities to resolve, and this often leads to violence. Some 26,000 Guarani Indians - divided between the Kaiowá and Nhandeva communities - live in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul. The state has 22 recognised Indian areas totalling 40,000 hectares. Amnesty International has documented a pattern of similar attacks on indigenous communities in the area by landowners contesting their rights to the land (see UA 09/97, AMR 19/01/97, 10 January 1997, and follow-up, AMR 19/10/97, 15 May 1997) often with the acquiescence or cooperation of local authorities.

Amnesty International has repeatedly expressed its concern at the level of human rights violations against indigenous people in Brazil that disputes over land rights have led to, including assaults, targeted killings and massacres. The organization believes that the authorities' failure to arbitrate promptly in disputes between the indigenous and non-indigenous communities leaves the indigenous groups vulnerable to attack.

#### **RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in Portuguese or your own language:**

- expressing your concern for the safety of the Guarani-Nhandeva community at Potrero-Guaçu, who were attacked by gunmen on 14 January, and calling on the federal government to guarantee their safety;
- urging the authorities to ensure that the community has immediate access to medical treatment and food;
- expressing concern that attempts were made to obstruct a proper investigation into the attack;
- calling on the authorities to open an immediate, impartial and thorough investigation into the attacks on the Guarani-Nhandeva, as well as the subsequent obstruction of justice, and that those found responsible are brought to justice;
- noting that indigenous groups are particularly vulnerable to violent attacks where there is uncertainty over the legal status of their territory;

- urging the federal government to arbitrate promptly in land disputes in order to reduce the risk of violence.

**APPEALS TO: (For all fax numbers, if voice answers, say "Fax, por favor" and wait for the tone)**

Minister of Justice

Exmo. Sr. Ministro da Justiça do Brasil

Dr. José Carlos Dias

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State Governor Mato Grosso do Sul

Exmo Sr Governador do

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**Salutation: Vossa Excelência / Your Excellency**

Mayor of Paranhos

Dr Eliomar Klabunde

Prefeitura de Paranhos

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**Salutation: Sr Prefeito / Dear Mayor**

**COPIES TO:**

Indigenous Rights Organization

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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 2 March 2000.