

URGENT ACTION

RURAL LEADER THREATENED IN LAND CONFLICT

Rural leader **Antônio Isídio Pereira da Silva** and families from the community of Vergel, in the interior of the north-eastern Brazilian state of Maranhão, have received a series of death threats. Vergel has long been targeted by loggers and land-grabbers who have repeatedly used violence to intimidate them.

The rural smallholder community of Vergel, 50km from the town of Codó in the interior of Maranhão state, is coming under sustained pressure from land-grabbers and loggers who want to drive them off their lands. According to **Antônio Isídio**, in December 2012 a gunman opened fire near his house, killing livestock; the same gunman has prevented his wife and other local women from harvesting babaçu nuts grown in nearby forests. In January 2013, the local chapel was burnt down, shortly before the community was due to mark the anniversary of the killing of rural leader Raimundo Pereira da Silva, who was shot in the back in January 2010. He is one of three rural leaders shot dead since the late 1980s; no one has yet been brought to justice for the killings. In April 2013 four of Antônio Isídio's goats had their ears cut off - a clear act of intimidation, seen in the community as a threat of future violence. This month, Antônio Isídio and other families told representatives of the Catholic Church's Pastoral Land Commission (Comissão Pastoral da Terra, CPT), that they had seen eight men carrying revolvers and shotguns in the area. Antônio Isídio has said that one gunman has been telling others in the community that he will be the next to die.

The federal programme for the protection of human rights defenders recently visited the community and interviewed Antônio Isídio. However, he has not yet received any form of protection. The CPT has protested publicly about the situation, elaborating their concerns on May 6 in an official letter to the National Agrarian Ombudsman. In their letter they call for urgent measures to ensure the safety of Antônio Isídio and other families and the immediate investigation of all allegations of threats and intimidation.

Please write immediately in Portuguese, English or your own language:

- Urging the authorities to guarantee the safety of the Vergel community and thoroughly investigate all allegations of threats against families and the destruction of property;
- Urging them to provide full protection for Antônio Isídio Pereira da Silva according to his wishes, under the federal program for the protection of human rights defenders;
- Urging them to investigate thoroughly all broader allegations of land-grabbing, illegal logging and encroachment onto smallholders' lands in the region, and bring those responsible to justice so as to prevent future land conflicts.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 20 JUNE 2013 TO:

Federal Human Rights Minister
 Exma. Ministra Chefe
 Maria do Rosário Nunes
 SCS Bloco B, Quadra 09, Lote C,
 Ed. Parque da Cidade, Corporate,
 Torre A, 10ºAndar CEP: 70308-200
 Brasília/DF, Brazil
 Fax: + 55 61 2025 9414

**Salutation: Dear Minister/
 Exmo. Sra. Ministra**

Governor of Maranhão
 Exma. Sra Governadora Roseana Sarney
 Palácio dos Leões
 Av. Dom Pedro II,
 s/nº Centro 65.010-904 - São Luís/MA,
 Brazil
 Fax: + 55 98 2108 9252 (if voice answers,
 ask: "sinal de fax por favor")

**Salutation: Dear Governor/
 Exma. Sra Governadora**

And copies to:
Pastoral Land Commission
 Comissão Pastoral da Terra – Maranhão
 Rua do Sol, nº 457, Centro
 CEP 65020-590,
 São Luís – MA, Brazil

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**



URGENT ACTION

RURAL LEADER THREATENED IN LAND CONFLICT

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

As the agricultural frontier has moved further into the interior, Indigenous, quilombola (descendants of former runaway slaves) and smallholder communities in the state of Maranhão have come under increasing pressure from land-grabbers (*grileiros*) and illegal loggers. Violent conflict has been endemic in the region for many years.

A leader of the Charco quilombola community in Maranhão, Flaviano Pinto Neto, was killed on 30 October 2010 with seven shots to the head (see UA 244/10, AMR 19/016/2010, 24 November 2010 (<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR19/016/2010>)). Community leaders from the Salgado quilombola community in Pirapemas have also been threatened (see UA 369/11 (<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR19/020/2011/en>)), as has the community of Santa Maria dos Moreiras in Codó, the same municipality as Vergel (UA 328/12 <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR19/018/2012/en>)).

The state of Maranhão is one of the poorest in Brazil, with one of the lowest Human Development Indexes in the country. In spite of very poor land distribution and widespread land-grabbing, there has been little political will for meaningful land reform. Quilombola and Indigenous communities fighting for their Constitutional rights to their lands have been violently confronted by large landowners, while historic smallholder communities have come into conflict with illegal loggers encroaching on their lands.

According to the CPT, there were over 184 instances of land conflict in the state of Maranhão in 2012 with more than 100 community leaders receiving death threats. Promised protection of community leaders under threat has not materialised and there have been few investigations into a series of complaints of human rights violations.

Name: Antônio Isídio Pereira da Silva (m), and families from the community of Vergel
Gender m/f: Both

UA: 120/13 Index: AMR 19/005/2013 Issue Date: 10 May 2013

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL

