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BRAZIL: DIOLINDA ALVES DE SOUZA , A WOMAN HELD HOSTAGE

On the occasion of International Women's Day, Amnesty International today called for the immediate and unconditional release of Diolinda Alves de Souza, member of the Brazilian Landless Rural Workers Movement (*Movimento Nacional dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra*) whom the organization believes is being held as a Prisoner of Conscience.

Diolinda Alves de Souza has been detained since 25 January in Alvares Machado, in the interior of São Paulo state, on charges of "forming a criminal band" [*formação de quadrilha ou bando*]. This is in relation to the activities of the Landless Movement, a legal organization which campaigns for agrarian reform and has staged a number of land occupations.

Her detention, however, appears less connected to any evidence linking her to a specific crime than to an attempt to pressure the Landless Movement to halt land occupations and for her husband, José Rainha Juniór, to surrender himself to the courts where he faces similar charges.

On 2 February, the police chief in the case informed her lawyer, in the presence of the judge and prosecutor, that Diolinda Alves de Souza and three other detainees would be released if José Rainha Juniór gave himself up. Despite this admission that the detainees were in effect being held as hostages until such time as José Rainha Juniór surrenders to the courts, judicial officials have taken no action to release them. The Brazilian courts have as yet failed to rule on the substance of four habeas corpus petitions presented on their behalf since 25 January.

"Habeas corpus is an urgent procedure to guarantee fundamental rights and should be respected at all times and considered without delay," Amnesty International said.

After a three-day hunger strike to protest their detention Diolinda Alves de Souza was transferred to hospital on 25 February for treatment for a gastritic ulcer caused by tension and put on an intravenous drip. She was returned to the Women's Prison in Alvares Machado *Cadeia Pública Feminina de Alvares Machado* on 5 March.

A 25 year-old mother of a two-year old child, Diolinda has stated: "I never learnt maths in my life. But now I'm learning. I count the minutes, the hours, the days....My dream, on leaving here, is to go back home and hug my son, dance with him and kiss him".

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