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@Political killing of trade unionist and political activist

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José Luis Sundermann, 37 trade unionist
Rosa Hernandes Sundermann, 37 political activist

Amnesty International is concerned at reports of the killing of the married couple José Luis Sundermann and Rosa Hernandes Sundermann in the early morning of 12 June 1994 in the town of São Carlos, in the interior of São Paulo state. The bodies of the two were found inside their house by their seventeen year old son. They had both been shot in the head, José Luis once and Rosa Hernandes twice. The police are reported to have ruled out burglary since no items had been stolen from the house and there were no signs of a struggle. They are reported to be treating the killings as political.

José Luis Sundermann was the Vice-President of the São Carlos Federal University Functionaries Union, and had been its President on three previous occasions. He was a director of the Federation of University Functionaries FASUBRA and was a member of the Regional Directorate of the Central Unica dos Trabalhadores (CUT), Workers Trade Union Congress. The couple were both members of the newly formed Partido Socialista dos Trabalhadores Unificado (PSTU) (Unified Socialist Workers Party), and Rosa Hernandes Sundermann had recently been elected a member of its National Directorate.

The couple are reported to have been active in supporting a number of strikes in the region - particularly by agricultural day labourers in the sugar cutting and orange growing industries in the São Carlos and Tabatinga region and were prominent in recent national strike by federal public functionaries.

At the end of 1993 José Luis Sundermann reported that they had been receiving anonymous death threats by telephone. In August 1993 he was present during an incident

in which striking sugar cane cutters threw stones at buses crossing picket lines, and a military policeman fired live ammunition into a crowd. Reportedly in February 1994 some shots were fired at the door of the Sundermanns' house by an unknown individual.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Peasants and trade unionists promoting land and labour rights have been the target of death threats, assaults and killings particularly in the north and north east of Brazil. Amnesty International has been concerned that these killings have continued with the acquiescence of state agents and sometimes with their participation. Despite a certain degree of violence related to land disputes in the state, and reports of violent policing of strikes, Amnesty International is not aware of any such rural killings in the state to date.

Amnesty International is concerned that in the run up to Presidential elections due to be held in October 1994, there may be an increase in political violence.

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| KEYWORDS: EXTRAJUDICIAL EXECUTION / TRADE UNIONISTS / POLITICAL ACTIVISTS / WOMEN / STRIKES / LAND PROBLEMS / |
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INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT, 1 EASTON STREET, LONDON WC1X 8DJ, UNITED KINGDOM
