

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Death Threats and Fear of Physical Safety

23 June 1992

BRAZIL:

Rafael José DOS SANTOS

Cícero da Conceição DOS SANTOS

Damião da Conceição DOS SANTOS

and their families (all sugar cane plantation workers)

José Cosme da Conceição DOS SANTOS, aged 14

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of Rafael José dos Santos, Cícero da Conceição dos Santos and Damião da Conceição dos Santos all workers at the *Usina Grande Vale* (Grande Vale Sugar Mill) in the Municipality of Neópolis, Sergipe state, who, as well as their families, are being subjected to death threats from the '*capangas do gerente da Usina Grande Vale*' (gunmen allegedly hired by the manager of the Grande Vale Sugar Mill). The organization is also concerned about the fate of José Cosme da Conceição dos Santos, the son of Rafael José dos Santos, who was last seen on 2 April 1992.

According to information recently received, the three men named above have been receiving death threats since March 1992 from gunmen allegedly hired by the manager of the Grande Vale Sugar Mill, because they refuse to leave their homes after having been made redundant. The three men, who worked at the Grande Vale Sugar Mill for around 12 years, have refused to leave their houses, which are provided for workers by the sugar mill, until they receive their redundancy payment.

On 2 April 1992, the hired gunmen reportedly broke down the doors of the workers' houses. The women and children, including the 14-year-old son of Rafael José dos Santos, José Cosme da Conceição dos Santos, escaped into the *canavial* (sugar cane plantation), fearing for their lives. José Cosme da Conceição dos Santos has not been seen since. On 16 April, the hired gunmen returned and ripped the roofs off the houses, threatening to demolish the houses with a tractor if they did not leave and telling them that they "...would kill them all..", "...vão matar todos..."

Rafael José dos Santos has denounced the death threats and the apparent "disappearance" of his son to the Police Station, *Delegacia*. According to reports received by Amnesty International, the Secretaria do Segurança Pública as well as the judiciary have refused to investigate the whereabouts of the 14-year-old boy. The Chief of Police, however, ordered the mill's management to have the houses' doors replaced and to stop the death threats. Nevertheless the gunmen have continued to threaten the three families.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Death threats are a common feature of rural violence in Brazil. They are part of a "culture of terror" aimed at intimidating individuals. Hundreds of people have been denied the protection of the law and have been deliberately killed by gunmen. Amnesty International considers that the persistent failure to prosecute the perpetrators of such abuses may be evidence of acquiescence in the crimes by the state authorities concerned, and may encourage them to be

repeated.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please telephone and send telegrams / telexes / faxes and airmail letters:

- expressing concern at the reported death threats to Rafael José dos Santos, Cícero da Conceição dos Santos, Damião da Conceição dos Santos and their families, by gunmen allegedly hired by the manager of the Grande Vale Sugar Mill;

page 2 of UA 209/92...

- urging that the death threats be thoroughly investigated and that those found responsible be brought immediately to justice, ensuring that death threats of this nature do not continue to be carried out with impunity;
- expressing concern for the physical safety of José Cosme da Conceição dos Santos who was last seen on 2 April 1992 and requesting an investigation into his whereabouts.

APPEALS TO:

1. Minister of Justice

Sr. Célio Borja
Ministro da Justiça
Ministério da Justiça
Esplanada dos Ministérios
Bloco 23
70.064 Brasília, DF
Brasil

Telegrams: Ministro Justica, Brasília, Brasil

Telexes: 611003 MNJU BR; 611088 MNJU BR; 612313 MNJU BR

Faxes: + 55 61 2244357

(Salutation Sr. Ministro de Justica / Dear Minister)

2. State Governor, Sergipe

Exmo. Sr. Governador do
Estado de Sergipe
Sr. João Alves Filho
Palácio Olympio Campos
49.900 Aracaju - SE, Brasil

Telegrams: Governador Sergipe, Aracaju, Sergipe, Brasil

(Salutation: Vossa Excelência / Your Excellency)

3. State Secretary of Public Security

Sr Secretário de Segurança Pública
Estado de Sergipe
Sr. Flamirion D'Avila Fontes
Praça Tobias Barret N° 20
49.000 - Aracaju - SE, Brasil

Telegrams: Secretário de Segurança Pública, Aracaju, Sergipe, Brasil

Telephone: + 55 79 222 8001/224.7444

(Salutation: Sr. Secretario / Dear Sir)

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

Popular Education Centre

Centro Sergipiano de Educação Popular

Rua Argentina 606
Bairro América
Caixa Postal 1029
49.060 Aracaju - SE, Brasil

and to diplomatic representatives of Brazil in your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after 4 August 1992.