

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Death Threats

15 July 1993

BRAZIL:

Sister Elsa Rosa ZOTTI and other Franciscan nuns

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of Sister Elsa Zotti and other Franciscan nuns working with indigenous people in Escondido, Mato Grosso do Sul, who have been subjected to death threats.

According to information received by Amnesty International, the death threats are believed to come from local landowners and agents of lumber companies, who are targeting the Franciscan nuns for their work defending the rights of the indigenous people of Escondido, in the Cotriguaçu region.

Earlier this month, two local peasants declared in a civil court that they had heard the vice mayor of Cotriguaçu stating that he had personally prevented the murder of Sister Elsa but that she could be killed within the next few months if she and the sisters continued to defend the demarcation of indigenous territory.

One of the Franciscan sisters, sister Salette, wrote to a friend:

"We are being persecuted and treated badly by the oppressors. We never know if we'll still be alive tomorrow. As you can see from the document, the date to eliminate one of our colleagues, Sister Elsa, has already been set."

"The lumber merchants, the owners of Cotriguaçu, who never tire of accumulating wealth, have declared war on all missionaries and indigenists. The suffering only makes our faith and commitment to the indigenous cause grow greater and firmer."

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In 1991 the Brazilian Government coined the slogan "Indian is Land". It was an acknowledgment of the centrality of land rights to the social, economic, cultural and political survival of Brazil's indigenous peoples. Their right to land which they have traditionally occupied is upheld by the 1988 Constitution which proclaims that the nation must demarcate and protect these lands and ensure the respect of Indian property.

In practice these rights have been ignored by land claimants who have abducted and killed Indians to drive them off land sought for the wealth of its resources. Indians who attempt to claim their constitutional rights as well as people working on their behalf are in danger of becoming victims of human rights abuses. Amnesty International takes no side in disputes over land. What concerns the organization is the persistent failure of successive governments to protect the fundamental rights of Brazil's indigenous peoples. The authorities at all

levels have failed to protect the Indians effectively or to bring to justice those responsible for killing, abducting, harassing and threatening them and their advisers, often in collusion with the police.

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RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes and airmail letters either in Portuguese, Spanish or in your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of sister Elsa Rosa Zotti and other Franciscan nuns from Escondido, Mato Grosso do Sul, following alleged death threats for their work on behalf of the indigenous people of the region;
- calling upon the authorities to take the necessary steps to investigate the threats and bring those responsible to justice;
- urging the authorities to take all possible measures to ensure the safety of sister Elsa Rosa Zotti and her fellow Franciscan nuns.

APPEALS TO

1. Minister of Justice:

Exmo Sr Mauricio Correa
Esplanada dos Ministérios
Bloco 23

70.064 Brasilia DF, Brazil

Telegrams: Ministerio da Justiça, Brasilia, Brasil

Faxes: +55 61 224 4357

Telexes: 611003 MNJU BR, 611088 MNJU BR

Salutation: Vossa Excelencia/Your Excellency

2. State Governor of Mato Grosso do Sul:

Exmo. Sr Pedro Pedrossian
Parque dos Poderes, Bloco B
79.100, Campo Grande - MS
Brazil

Telegrams: Governador Mato Grosso do Sul, Campo Grande, Brasil

Faxes: +55 67 726 4176

Telexes: 673192 mspcbr

Salutation: Vossa Excelencia/Your Excellency

3. State Secretary of Public Security, Mato Grosso do Sul:

Sr José Rizkallah
Parque dos Poderes, Bloco 6
79.046, Campo Grande - MS
Brazil

Telegrams: Secretário Segurança Pública, Mato Grosso do Sul, Campo Grande, Brasil

Faxes: + 55 67 726 4085

Telexes: 671599mspcbr

Salutation: Sr Secretário/Mr Secretary

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

Centro de Defesa dos Direitos Humanos "Marçal de Souza"
Rua Marechal Rondon 408 (Human Rights Centre)
Campo Grande - MS
Brazil

Conselho Indigenista Missionario (CIMI)
Edificio Venancio III conj 309-14 (Catholic Church's Indigenist
Setor Diversoes Sul Missionary Council)
70.084 Brasilia DF, Brazil.

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 26 August 1993.