

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Possible extrajudicial execution/Fear for safety

BRAZIL

Manoel Bonfim Bastos, 39, father of 5, killed
Zilda de Jesus Silva, 51, mother of 12, killed

wounded: Carlos Barbosa Santos Lima, 21
Deusdete Dutra Costa, 50
Ednaldo Silva Souza, 26
José de Jesus Sena, 33
Marcelo Rocha Santos, 17
Ariosvaldo José dos Santos, 51

and other rural workers camped on the roadside in Vitoria da Conquista, Bahia.

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of a group of 500 landless rural workers and their families camped on the side of the road outside the *Fazenda Mocambo* (Mocambo Estate), in Vitoria da Conquista in Bahia state. This follows an incident on 29 October when gunmen fired on them killing two and seriously wounding six. Leaders of the group had previously received death threats and the families had been shot at on other occasions. There are suspicions that police personnel may have been among the gunmen.

On 29 October a group of the families entered the Mocambo estate to clear some rough vegetation next to the roadside, which they claimed the gunmen used as cover to fire at them in the encampment. Once on the property, when they tried to discuss the situation with the landowner, the families were allegedly surrounded by a group of gunmen who started to beat them and fire shots at them. A number of women and children were injured. The families reacted with farm implements, wounding some of the gunmen. One of the gunmen - wearing a hood to cover his face - reportedly claimed to be a civil policeman, another wore a bullet proof jacket. It is further alleged that some of the gunmen wore surgical gloves. (These are regularly issued to police personnel as a protection against HIV infection when in contact with blood from wounds of members of the public).

According to reports, the gunmen proceeded to fire at the rural workers. A number were wounded in the back as they tried to flee. Manoel Bonfim Bastos and Zilda de Jesus Silva were shot dead. Six other rural workers are being treated in hospital for bullet wounds. Ariosvaldo José dos Santos risks paraplegia as a result of a bullet wound in the neck.

A military police detachment has been sent to the estate and some military police have been stationed at the hospital. No news has been reported, however, of an investigation into those responsible for the killing and wounding of rural workers on the estate. There continue to be fears for the lives of community leaders, who were the main targets of the death threats.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The group of families had been seeking to be settled on land in the Vitoria da Conquista area through government land reform procedures. They had previously been expelled after attempting to occupy another estate in the area. After the Mocambo Estate was included on a list issued by the government of properties to be expropriated for land reform, the families attempted to occupy it on 12 August 1994. They were expelled shortly afterwards by military police carrying out a court order. Since that time, they have been camped on the roadside outside the Mocambo estate, waiting for the estate to be expropriated by the government and receiving food and water from local government and non-governmental agencies.

Landless rural workers and squatter peasants and have been the target of threats, assaults, abductions and killings in the context of disputes over land in Brazil.

While Amnesty International takes no position on such competing land claims, the organization is concerned at the impunity with which gunmen allegedly acting on behalf of landowners continue to intimidate and carry out violent attacks on peasant communities with the apparent tolerance of local authorities. Amnesty International is also concerned with the extent of direct police involvement in these crimes. Of 173 cases of rural murders involving hired gunmen being investigated by the Attorney General's Office in Brazil in 1993, 80 proved to have direct participation of military and civil police personnel.

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

- Expressing concern for the safety of members of a community of rural workers camped outside the Mocambo estate in Vitoria da Conquista, Bahia state after they have received death threats and been shot at;
- Seeking assurances for the safety of members of the community and their leaders;
- Expressing concern at the killing of Manoel Bonfim Bastos and Zilda de Jesus Silva and the wounding of six others by gunmen on 29 October;
- Seeking a full investigation into the killings, including an investigation into possible police involvement in the incident, and for all those responsible to be brought to justice.

APPEALS

Secretary of Public Security

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Estado da Bahia
Dr Francisco Netto
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Faxes: + 55 71 320 4175

Telegrams: Secretário Netto, Secretaria de Segurança Pública, Salvador, Brazil

Salutation: Sr. Secretário/ Mr Secretary

Governor of Bahia

Exmo Sr Governador do Estado da Bahia
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Palacio do Governo
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Telegrams: Exmo. Imbassuí, Palacio do Governo, Salvador, Brazil
Salutation: Vossa Excelência/ Your Excellency

Minister of Justice

Exmo Sr Ministro de Justiça
Dr Alexandre Dupeyrat
Ministério de Justiça
Espalanda dos Ministérios
70.064-900 Brasília DF, Brazil

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Telegrams: Exmo. Ministro Dupeyrat, Ministério de Justiça, Brasília, Brazil
Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO

Local Diocesan Commission on Rural questions
Comissão Rural Dioscesiana
Caixa Postal 10
45.100-000 Vitoria da Conquista, BA, 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 14 December 1994.