

BRAZILOrlando Canuto, town councillor

Orlando Canuto, a town councillor in Rio Maria, Pará state, was involved in the impeachment of the town's mayor in September this year. A former advisor to the mayor was shot dead on 4 November, and a man suspected of involvement in the killing, José Serafim Sales, known as "Barrerito", has been seen in the town. Orlando Canuto has recently received death threats, and although police have warned him of the risk presented to him by the presence of "Barrerito", they do not appear to have taken steps to arrest him. Amnesty International is gravely concerned for Orlando Canuto's safety.

"Barrerito" escaped from a prison near Rio Maria in March last year, reportedly with the help of prison guards. He had been serving a 25-year sentence for the murder of trade unionist Expedito Ribeiro de Souza, who was shot dead in Rio Maria in 1991. Barrerito has long worked for powerful landowners and politicians in the region, who are reported to have protected him from arrest since his escape.

Since the mayor was impeached a violent and highly charged political situation has developed in Rio Maria, and "Barrerito's" presence in the town is part of this.

Orlando Canuto's father and two brothers were rural trade union leaders in Rio Maria. All three were killed by gunmen for their involvement in land disputes, his father in 1985 and both his brothers in 1990. Orlando himself was seriously wounded in the ambush in which his brothers were killed.

The trial of those accused of ordering the killing of Orlando's father, João Canuto, is set to start soon in the region. Amnesty International is concerned that with the recent escalation in the endemic violence in southern Pará, it will not be possible to guarantee a fair and impartial trial, or the safety of those involved in the proceedings. Amnesty International is therefore calling on the Pará authorities to transfer the trial from southern Pará to the state capital, Belém.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Violence has reached critical levels in recent months in southern Pará. Hired gunmen have killed eight rural activists and workers in the area so far this year. Such gunmen often belong to private security firms hired by landowners that act with the connivance of the police. They are reported to have been involved in kidnappings, beatings and forced evictions. Slave labour is also a serious and longstanding problem in the region.

An investigative commission of Federal deputies travelled to the south of Pará in October and recommended that a Federal police team be immediately sent to the area to investigate and bring to justice those involved in perpetuating the cycle of violence in the state.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Portuguese, English or your own language:

- calling on the authorities to take immediate steps to find and arrest Jose Serafim Sales, also known as "Barrerito";

- expressing your concern that the presence of "Barrerito" in Rio Maria is contributing to the escalating climate of fear and violence in the region;
- calling on the authorities to investigate and dismantle all private security firms believed to be involved in human rights violations in the area;
- noting the reported links between Pará state police and those who commit human rights violations in the South of Pará, and calling for an immediate and impartial Federal police investigation into the critical human rights situation in the region;
- expressing your concern that the trial of those accused of ordering the 1995 killing of João Canuto will not meet international standards of impartiality and security unless it is moved to Belém, the state capital.

APPEALS TO:Governor of Pará State

Exmo. Sr. Governador do Estado do Pará
 Sr. Almir José de Oliveira Gabriel
 Palácio dos Despachos
 Rodovia Augusto Montenegro KM 9
 66823-010 Belém, PA, Brazil

Fax: + 55 91 248 0133**Salutation:Vossa Excelência/Your Excellency**Pará State Secretary for Public Security

Secretário de Segurança Pública do Estado do Pará
 Sr. Paulo Celso P. Sette Câmara
 Rua Arcipreste Manoel Teodoro 305
 66023-700 Belém, PA, Brazil

Fax: + 55 91 225 2644**Salutation:Sr Secretário/ Dear Secretary**Federal Minister of Justice

Exmo. Sr. Ministro da Justiça do Brasil
 Dr.Aloysio Nunes Ferreira
 Ministério da Justiça
 Esplanada dos Ministérios
 Bloco 'T', 4º andar, Sala 400
 70064-900 Brasília, DF, Brazil

Fax: + 55 61 322 6817/225 0289**Salutation:Vossa Excelência/Your Excellency**Secretary of State for Human Rights

Exmo. Sr. Secretário de Estado dos Direitos Humanos
 Paulo Sergio Pinheiro
 Secretaria de Estado dos Direitos Humanos
 Ministério da Justiça
 Esplanada dos Ministérios
 Bloco T, 4º andar, Sala 420
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Fax: + 55 61 223 2260/226 7980**Salutation:Sr Secretário/ Dear Secretary****COPIES TO:**President of the Tribunal of Justice of the State of Pará

Presidente do Tribunal de Justiça do Estado de Pará
 Desembargadora Dra Climenie Bernadete

de Araújo Pontes
Tribunal de Justiça do Estado do Para
Praça República do Libano 310, Cidade Velha
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Fax: + 55 91 218 2454

Pastoral Land Commission
CPT Xinguara
Rua Pau Brasil 40, Caixa Postal 57
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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 10 January 2002.