

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Please bring this action to the attention of the person responsible for outreach work in your section for distribution to environmental groups.

UA 389/92 Possible extrajudicial execution/
Fear of extrajudicial execution

9 December 1992

BRAZIL: Valdinar Pereira Barros, trade unionist
Francisco Geronimo da Silva "Dequinha", trade unionist

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of Valdinar Pereira Barros, President of the Rural Workers Trade Union of Imperatriz. He was wounded in an attack on him by gunmen on 3 December 1992, in which another trade union director Francisco Geronimo da Silva "Dequinha" was killed. Valdinar Pereira Barros was taken to hospital in Imperatriz to treat his gunshot wounds. On 6 December, three days after the assault, his trade union colleagues had to prevent an unknown man from entering the hospital, whom they believed intended to kill the Trade Union President. On 8 December as he was leaving the hospital, another armed man was found within the hospital precincts. Valdinar Pereira Barros has since gone into hiding.

Valdenar Pereira Barros, Francisco Geronimo da Silva, two other trade union colleagues and a driver were caught in an ambush when returning from a mass on the evening of 3 December. They were called to help fix a car that had ostensibly broken down, and when they returned to their own car four gunmen opened fire. Valdenar Pereira Barros was wounded in the foot and arm, and managed to escape. Francisco Geronimo da Silva attempted to flee but as he returned seeking help from his colleagues who were still in the car for his injuries, the gunmen reportedly opened fired again. He died of 10 gunshot wounds.

Valdenar Pereira Barros had been receiving death threats during 1992 for his trade union activities supporting rural workers in land disputes with powerful land claimants. In April 1992 a landowner involved in one of these disputes was killed. As a result of the killing, the commander of military police for Maranhão, also a local landowner, lost his police job. He then made declarations on television against the trade union President. Since then Valdenar Pereira Barros has received a number of threats from other sources and hired gunmen have been seen near the trade union building.

Valdenar Pereira Barros was particularly involved in supporting moves to set up the Mata Grande and Siriaco Extractive Reserves, ecological reserves for sustainable harvesting of forest produce. The reserves, which would involve government expropriation of land, were proposed to preserve Babaçu trees (a kind of coconut tree) in danger of being cut down. Local small scale producers represented by the trade union, depended for their living on these trees. Following the attack on 3 December, the Federal Government's own environmental agency, IBAMA, expressed concern about the level of violence in the region "against those who seek to live integrated

with their environment".

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Hundreds of peasants and rural trade union leaders have been killed in Brazil in the context of land disputes. One of these was the trade union leader Chico Mendes killed in 1988 for his work defending extractive reserves for rubber tappers in Acre state. While Amnesty International takes no position on competing claims in land disputes it is concerned that gunmen, including off-duty policemen, allegedly acting on behalf of landowners have carried out intimidation and killings of peasants, their leaders and advisers with a high degree of

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impunity, and in some cases with the complicity of local authorities. Brazilian authorities on all levels have in the vast majority of cases failed to take effective action to prevent or investigate the killings or bring those responsible to justice

Out of 1,684 cases of such killings between 1964 and 1991 only 25 cases came to trial and in only 14 cases were people convicted.

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

- expressing concern for the killing of Francisco Geronimo da Silva and attempted killing of Valdenar Pereira de Barros, Director and President of the Rural Workers Trade Union of Imperatriz, respectively, on 3 December 1992;

- urging a full investigation into the case and that those found responsible be brought to justice;

- expressing concern for the safety of Valdenar Pereira de Barros in the light of other possible attempts on his life;

- urging that all necessary steps are taken to ensure his physical integrity and that of other directors of the Rural Workers Trade Union of Imperatriz.

APPEALS TO

1) State Governor:

Exmo Sr Governador do Estado do Maranhão
Sr Edson Lobão
Palacio dos Leoes
Av Dom Pedro II
65.000 Sao Luis, MA, Brazil

**Salutation: Exmo Sr Governador /
Dear Governor**

Telegrams: Governador Lobao, Sao Luis, MA, Brazil

2) State Secretary of Public Security:

Sr Secretario de Segurança Pública
do Estado de Maranhão
Rua da Palma no 247 Centro
65.000 São Luis, MA, Brazil

**Salutation: Sr Secretario de
Segurança Pública /
Dear Sir**

Telegrams: Secretario Segurança Pública, Sao Luis, MA, Brazil

Telexes: 98 2293

Faxes: + 55 98 255 2952

3) Superintendent of Federal Police in Maranhão:

Sr Superintendente da Policia Federal
no Maranhão
Av. Kennedy 2000
Bairro de Fatima

**Salutation: Sr Superintendente /
Dear Sir**

65.000 Sao Luis, MA, Brazil

Telegrams: Superintendente Policia Federal, Sao Luis, MA, Brazil

Faxes: + 55 98 223 5099

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

Rural Workers Union Imperatriz:

Sindicato dos Trabalhadores Rurais de Imperatriz

Rua Jão Lisboa 1205

Bairro Juçara

95.900 Imperatriz, MA, Brazil

Procurator for Human Rights Attorney General's Office:

Sub-Procurador Geral da Republica

Dr Alvaro Ribeiro da Costa

Procuradoria Geral da Republica

Avenida L2 Sul, SG AS 603, Lote 23,

70.000 Brasilia D.F. Brazil

Faxes: +55 61 313 5444

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 20 January 1993.