

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

AI Index: AMR 19/002/2007 (Public)
News Service No: 007
12 January 2007

Brazil: Another victim in the Guarani-Kaiowá's struggle for land

Kuretê Lopes, a 69-year-old Guarani-Kaiowá indigenous woman, has become the latest victim of land-related violence which blights the Brazilian state of Mato Grosso do Sul. Kuretê Lopes died when she was shot in the chest by a private security guard during an eviction from farm lands that the Guarani-Kaiowá claim as ancestral.

The death of Kuretê Lopes fits into a pattern of violence and intimidation against indigenous peoples fighting for the constitutional right to their ancestral lands in Mato Grosso do Sul, a state which has become an epicentre of human rights abuses against indigenous peoples.

On Friday, 5 January, a group of around 50 Guarani-Kaiowá indigenous people occupied land they claim as ancestral in the Madama farm in the region of Kurusu Mba, Mato Grosso do Sul. According to reports, in the early morning of 9 January about 40 armed men working for a private security company entered the farm in a convoy of trucks to remove them. During the eviction Kuretê Lopes was shot dead and 22-year-old Valdecir Ximenez was shot three times in the leg. All the Guarani-Kaiowá, including the body of Kuretê Lopes and the wounded Valdecir Ximenez, were then forced onto the trucks and a bus and driven off the farm. They were left by the side of a highway, near the Taquapery indigenous village where they live. The Guarani-Kaiowá are now fighting for the right to have the Kuretê Lopes's body buried on the spot where she was murdered, which is customary for the Guarani.

There are fears that the men who killed Kuretê Lopes worked for the same private security company whose employees shot dead another member of the Guarani-Kaiowá community, thirty-nine-year-old Dorvalino Rocha, a week after a violent eviction in December 2005.

Amnesty International is calling on the Federal authorities to thoroughly investigate the death of Kuretê Lopes. There is also an urgent need for more stringent controls on private security companies, which have long been implicated in violence and intimidation against indigenous peoples throughout Brazil.

The Brazilian authorities must set out clear policies and specific strategies for tackling the persistent human rights issues that affect Brazil's indigenous population. Unless the Federal government intervenes decisively to speed up the process of land demarcations, provide protection for the state's indigenous peoples, and peacefully resolve land conflicts, Mato Grosso do Sul will continue to be a byword for violence against indigenous peoples.

Background Information

Despite being one of the most populous indigenous peoples in Brazil, the Guarani-Kaiowá have one of the smallest ratios of land per person for any indigenous group in the country. The majority of the Guarani-Kaiowá live in 27 officially recognised territories in the south of Mato Grosso do Sul state - rural

pockets of poverty surrounded by large soya and sugar cane plantations, and overcrowded urban reserves where life is plagued by malnutrition, ill-health, squalid living conditions, suicide, violence and alcoholism. Since the 1990s, the Guarani-Kaiowá have been trying to reverse the process of dispossession and impoverishment to which they have been subject for centuries. A series of indigenous leaders have been killed while peacefully occupying ancestral lands, including Marcos Veron, who was beaten to death by farm labourers and hired gunmen in January 2003. In December 2005, thirty-nine-year-old Dorvalino Rocha was shot in the chest by a private security guard hired by local landowners, in the aftermath of a violent eviction.