

0001 hrs gmt Friday 29 April 1994

### **TRADE UNIONISTS UNDER FIRE**

An assassin fatally shot Arnaldo Delcídio Ferreira, president of a Brazilian rural workers trade union, in front of his 17-year-old son, just as last year's local May Day celebrations ended in the Brazilian state of Pará.

It was the fourth attempt on his life. Arnaldo was just one among 23 rural trade union leaders who have been assassinated in Brazil in the past three years.

The assassins frequently turn out to be members of the security forces hired by landowners to murder and dispose of peasants or their representatives involved in land or labour disputes. A landowner arrested in connection with Arnaldo's murder was released from police custody and has since gone into hiding.

For decades trade unionists have been the targets of killings, "disappearances", arbitrary imprisonment and death threats by security forces in all regions of the world.

On May Day Amnesty International launches an international membership action focusing on eight such trade unionists from Benin, Chad, China, Colombia, Haiti, Indonesia, Morocco and Turkey. The organization is calling on all governments to protect trade unionists from the persecution they suffer purely for standing up for workers' rights.

Being a rural trade unionist in many countries around the world can mean losing your life. In Colombia, trade unionists in both rural and urban areas are targeted for extrajudicial execution, "disappearance" and intimidation by the armed forces and their paramilitary auxiliaries. According to one human rights organization, 217 trade unionists were murdered in Colombia in the year following August 1992.

Hundreds of people including trade unionists have been "disappeared" in Morocco since 1963 and many may still be alive in secret detention. Abdelhaq Rouissi, a member of the Moroccan Labour Union, "disappeared" over 29 years ago on 4 October 1964. Amnesty International has received reports that he is still alive and in poor health.

Just attempting to set up an independent trade union in countries such as China can be cause enough for arrest and imprisonment. Liu Jingsheng has not been seen by his wife and 10-year-old daughter for two years. He was arrested by the Beijing police on 1 June 1992 because of his involvement with an organization calling on workers to create independent trade unions and has been detained without charge or trial ever since.

Countries all over the world repeatedly put economic growth before all human rights considerations and workers' labour and human rights frequently clash with business and government interests.

Military intervention in labour disputes in Indonesia has frequently resulted in activists facing arrest, ill-treatment and even torture. On 11 February this year at least 19 trade unionists were detained on the eve of a general strike, solely for their peaceful activities.

**In countries torn apart by conflict trade unionists are often targeted as part of a wider pattern of repression. M'Ballao Mianbe and two bystanders were gunned down by the Chadian army on 26 June 1993, after he had organized a series of nationwide strikes in protest at government austerity measures and in support of civil servants who had not been paid.**

**And Munir Ceylan, president of the petroleum workers' union in Turkey, was arrested for inciting "enmity and hatred" after he wrote a newspaper article calling on workers to do what they could to halt the violence in Turkey. He will begin his 20-month term as a prisoner of conscience in June this year.**

**Amnesty International is urging governments, as a first step, to ratify and, more importantly, put into action the United Nations (UN) International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions dealing with freedom of association.**

**"It is particularly disturbing that of the eight countries highlighted in this action, all but China have ratified the ILO conventions, but none have actually put them into practice," said Amnesty International.**

**"If these freedoms are not protected, no one's human rights are safe. It is governments who are responsible for the persecution of trade unionists. And it is governments who must be responsible for putting an end to it."**

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