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Fear for Safety

21 March 2000

BRAZIL

Members of the Macuxi and Wapixana indigenous groups

Sirley Fátima Weber (f), nun

Edna Margarida Pitarelli (f), nun

Jeronimo Pereira da Silva, coordinator general of the *Conselho Indígena de Roraima* (CIR), Indigenous Council of Roraima

Jacir Jose da Souza, CIR regional leader

Walter Blós, official with the *Fundação Nacional do Índio*, (FUNAI), National Indian Foundation

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of Macuxi and Wapixana indigenous people of Roraima State, Brazil, and of the individuals named above, all of whom have been harassed and threatened in connection with their involvement in campaigning for the legalization of the indigenous people's claim to territory in Roraima State.

Amnesty International is also concerned that local and state authorities have fueled tension between the indigenous and non-indigenous population, making indigenous groups more vulnerable to attack by making public statements against the land claim.

On 2 March 2000, 90 heavily armed military police personnel set up a road-block near the community of Urucuri, Sao Mateus, Roraima State. They reportedly approached passing indigenous people and threatened to arrest Jeronimo Pereira da Silva and Jacir Jose de Souza of the *Conselho Indígena de Roraima*, (CIR), Indigenous Council of Roraima.

On 4 March 2000 Sirley Fátima Weber and Edna Margarida Pitarelli, nuns with the *Servas do Espírito Santo* religious order who work with Macuxi and Wapixana indigenous people, were traveling with nine Macuxi and Wapixana women and children towards the indigenous territory of Ananás in the Amajari region. At approximately 10am, as they crossed a bridge over the river Ereu, their car was ambushed by a group of more than 30 landowners and their farmhands. Armed with sticks the landowners threatened and shouted at the nuns and indigenous people for an hour, eventually forcing them out of their car. One of the landowners allegedly threatened one of the nuns saying, "*isto é apenas o começo de muitas outras ações*" ("this is just the first of many more moves").

The nuns and indigenous people were forced to walk nearly 30km back to the village of Cajueiro. As they walked the group of landowners drove alongside them, threatening and swearing at them. The landowners kept the nuns' car which was later found destroyed and abandoned in the river Ereu. The nuns later reported the incident to the Federal Police.

Walter Blós, the local official of the state run *Fundação Nacional do Índio* (FUNAI), National Indian Foundation in Boa Vista, which is responsible for the process of legalization of the territorial claims, has had to go into hiding after reportedly receiving death-threats from landowners.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Amnesty International has documented a pattern of violence against indigenous people in the state of Roraima, highlighted by the shooting on 7 February 1999 of Macuxi Indian Paulo José de Souza and the stabbing of *Conselho Indigenista Missionario* (CIMI) Indigenous Missionary Council missionary Egon Heck on 10 February 1999 [see UA 24/99, AMR 19/01/99]. The violence has its roots in the long and slow process of legalization of indigenous territories.

The Macuxi and Wapaxani indigenous people in Roraima State have been awaiting the final stage (*homologação* - the ratification and registration of a Presidential decree) in the legalization of their territorial claim since the beginning of 1999. This is being fiercely contested by local politicians and landowners. Billboards contesting the indigenous land claim have been put up in Boa Vista, the capital of Roraima state. The state governor has also threatened to close 138 indigenous schools if the *homologação* goes ahead.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in Portuguese or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of those named in this action who are working in defence of the rights of indigenous peoples;
- calling on the federal authorities to take steps to protect the safety of the Macuxi and Wapixana and those working on their behalf;
- calling for a prompt, full and independent investigation into the above cases of harassment, and for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- expressing concern at reports that local and state authorities have made statements inciting the non-indigenous population to violence against the Indians;
- calling for anyone responsible for inciting or carrying out acts of violence or intimidation against the indigenous population to be brought to justice;
- noting that indigenous groups are particularly vulnerable to violent attacks where there is uncertainty regarding the legal status of their territory and calling on the federal authorities to arbitrate promptly in land disputes.

APPEALS TO: (NB: If a voice answers a fax number, ask for "*sinal do fax, por favor.*")

Minister of Justice

Exmo. Sr. Ministro da Justiça do Brasil

Dr. José Carlos Dias

Ministério da Justiça

Esplanada dos Ministérios, Bloco 23

CEP 70064-900 Brasília - DF, Brazil

Fax: + 55 61 224 2448/322 6817

Salutation: Your Excellency/Vossa Excelência

Fundação Nacional do Índio, (FUNAI) National Indian Foundation

Exmo. Sr. Presidente da FUNAI

Dr. Carlos Frederico Marés de Souza Filho

SETS Quadra 702/902, Edifício LEX, 3 andar, Bloco A,

70340-904 - Brasília - DF, Brazil

Fax: + 55 61 226 8782

Salutation: Exmo. Dr./ Dear Sir

Roraima State Governor

Exmo. Sr. Governador do Estado de Roraima

Dr Neudo Ribeiro Campos

Palácio Senador Hélio Campos, Praça do Centro Cívico

69301-380 - Boa Vista - RR, Brazil

Fax: + 55 95 623 2440
Salutation: Your Excellency/Vossa Excelência

COPIES TO:

Conselho Indigenista Missionario (CIMI)

SDS Ed. Venâncio III, salas 309 a 314, 70393-900 - Brasília - DF, Brazil

Conselho Indigena de Roraima (CIR)

Av. Sebastião Diniz, 1672, São Vicente, 69303-120, Boa Vista, RR, 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 1 May 2000.