

URGENT ACTION

ACTION BRINGS INVESTIGATION AND SAFETY

An investigation into threats made against peasant farmer and land rights activist, José Luís da Silva, his wife, Severina dos Santos Silva, and their family has brought protection and safety.

The NGO Associação de apoio aos assentamentos e comunidades quilombolas (AACADE, Support association for settlers and quilombola communities), which supports the families who settled on the Quirino farm in Paraíba, sent this message to Amnesty International on 20 July.

“Amnesty International’s campaign, had [an] immediate effect. As a consequence of the Urgent Action a special police investigator was appointed to follow the investigations into the attack on the Silva family. This appointment was the consequence of steps taken by federal and state authorities which had received letters from Amnesty members from around the world. Another consequence of the campaign was the airing of a television programme called “I want justice”, broadcast on 14 April of this year. It was the first time that the case [of the Quirino farm] had been presented impartially and accurately. Thirdly, and most importantly, the threats diminished significantly.

Through Amnesty International's support “we were also able to provide psychological and medical treatment to the mother, father and three children [who all suffered in the attack] for a period of one year. Also, two meetings of the whole community were held [to support the] group, as the attack against the one family ... [had been intended] to intimidate all the community settled on the farm. ... The results from the family’s treatment are visible. The treatment has been fundamental in helping to rebuild the family and community relations, as well as for the progression of the judicial case. In April and May of this year there were several hearings and the victims of the attack had to testify several times in front of their attackers. The quality of their testimony was attributed to the treatment they are receiving with the support of Amnesty International.

The judicial process is still continuing and is moving more quickly...For us in the AACADE, the family, the community and the Comissão Pastoral da Terra (CPT, Pastoral Land Commission) who are following the judicial case, Amnesty International’s support was fundamental in ensuring that the judicial proceedings did not end up benefiting the attackers. We would therefore like to thank the volunteers and staff of Amnesty International and ask that they continue to follow the case.”

No further action is needed at this time. Many thanks to all who sent appeals. Amnesty International will continue to monitor the situation.

This is the first update of UA 05/09 AMR 19/001/2009.

Further information: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR19/001/2009/en>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

José Luís da Silva, his wife Severina dos Santos Silva, and their 25-year-old daughter Edisandra, received death threats in relation to a court case brought against four men they allege were involved in a violent attack on their family in December 2007. The family believe that they were targeted specifically because of their fight for land rights, which has involved a long-running dispute with a local farm owner.

The family has lived in a peasant farming community on the Quirino farm for over 20 years. In 1998, after the community had been threatened with eviction by the owner of the farmland, the National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform (Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária, INCRA), the federal body responsible for the implementation of land reform) ruled that the land the community lives on should be turned over to the peasant farmers who live there as a part of the agricultural reform process. Since this ruling, the owner of the farm has been fighting this decision in the courts, while allegedly threatening and intimidating the settlers (posseiros), some of whom have lived on the land for up to 50 years.

Further information on UA: 05/09 Index: AMR 19/013/2009 Issue Date: 22 July 2009

