

EXTERNAL

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Fear for safety

12 December 1997

BRAZIL Some 1,000 members of the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra*

Approximately 1,000 members of the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* (MST), Landless Rural Workers Movement, are currently surrounded by armed riot police in the centre of Fortaleza, capital of the Northeastern state of Ceará.

Amnesty International is concerned that the rural workers, including entire families, are at risk of serious human rights violations. There is a pattern in Brazil of violence against landless peasants by military police carrying out evictions and dispersing demonstrators (see background).

The MST have been camped in the centre of Fortaleza since 27 November 1997, in front of the building housing the *Secretaria de Desenvolvimento Rural do Ceará*, Ceará Rural Development Secretariat. They have been demonstrating to persuade Ceará state Governor, Tasso Jereissati, to speed up implementation of an agreement signed by the Governor in July, providing for the setting up of housing, education and agricultural projects in the state's *assentamentos* (areas where the government has settled landless rural workers). The area has suffered a sustained period of drought.

Following a breakdown in negotiations between the state government and the MST, a large contingent of armed riot police was sent at dawn on 12 December to surround the area where the MST are camped out. There are currently said to be around 1,000 military and other police, some armed with machine guns, with reinforcements on the way. Tension in the area is extremely high, as police have reportedly cut off all food and water to the MST, and have denied access to journalists. State deputy Mario Mamede, the president of the Human Rights Commission of the Ceará Legislative Assembly, visited the area in order to attempt to negotiate, but was beaten with rifle butts by military police.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The MST campaigns for land reform by organizing demonstrations and land occupations in many states throughout Brazil. This has frequently resulted in violent confrontations between the landless and military police.

Amnesty International has frequently expressed concern at a pattern of violence against landless rural workers during evictions by military police, which includes two massacres in 1995 and 1996. In August 1995 military police killed at least nine landless rural workers during an eviction in Corumbiara, Rondônia state, and in April 1996, 19 members of the MST were extrajudicially executed when military police were sent in to clear a road at Eldorado de Carajás. In both cases many more landless rural workers were tortured and ill-treated. The current situation in Fortaleza bears a disturbing resemblance to events in April 1996.

Land-reform and land-related conflict have become a pressing social issue for the Brazilian government. After the Corumbiara and Eldorado de Carajás massacres new legislation was passed intended to accelerate land settlement procedures, regulate the granting of eviction orders and curb police excesses by ensuring that all evictions are carried out in the presence of officials of the state prosecution service (*Ministério Público*).

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

- expressing concern for the physical safety of some 1,000 members of the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* (MST) in Fortaleza, Ceará, who are currently surrounded by some 1,000 armed riot police;
- expressing concern that state deputy, Mario Mamede, was beaten by military police with rifle butts, while attempting to enter the area in order to negotiate a peaceful solution to the crisis;
- noting the history of extrajudicial execution, torture and ill-treatment of landless rural workers by military police during evictions and the dispersal of demonstrators;
- calling on the authorities to take all possible steps to negotiate a peaceful solution, and to ensure that the police adhere to international standards for the minimum use of force and firearms.

APPEALS TO:State Governor, Ceará

Exmo. Sr. Governador do Estado do Ceará

Sr. Tasso Jereissati

Centro Administrativo, Gov.

Virgílio Távora, Cambéba

Fortaleza CE, 60839-500 Brazil

Faxes: +55 85 218 1066 (if voice, ask for fax)**Telegrams: Governador Estado, Fortaleza, Ceara, Brazil****Salutation: Vossa Excelência / Your Excellency**Public Security Secretary, Ceará

Exmo. Sr. Secretário de Segurança Pública do Estado de Ceará

Sr. Edgar Fuques

Secretaria de Segurança Pública

Rua do Rosário 199, 3º Andar, Centro,

Fortaleza CE, 60055-090 Brazil

Faxes: +55 85 224 3234 (if voice, ask for fax)**Telegrams: Secretaria Seguranca Publica, Fortaleza, Ceara, Brazil****Salutation: Sr. Secretário / Dear Secretary**Attorney General, Ceará

Procurador Geral do Estado de Ceará

Dr. Nicéforo Fernandes

Av. Santos Dumont 1687, 9º andar

Fortaleza CE, 60150-000 Brazil

Faxes: +55 85 268 3089 (if voice, ask for fax)**Telegrams: Procurador Geral, Fortaleza, Ceara, Brazil****Salutation: Vossa Excelência/ Your Excellency**Military Police Commander, Ceará

Comandante da Polícia Militar do Ceará

Cel. Francisco Mauro Alves Benevides

Av. Aguanambi S/N Fátima

Fortaleza CE, 60513-390 Brazil

Faxes: +55 85 247 1900 (if voice, ask for fax)**Telegrams: Comandante Policia Militar, Fortaleza, Ceara, Brazil****Salutation: Exmo. Sr./ Dear Sir****COPIES TO:**Ceará Human Rights Commission

Comissão de Direitos Humanos e Cidadania da Assembléia Legislativa do Estado do Ceará

Av. Desembargador Moreira 2807, Gab. 513

Fortaleza - CE, 60-170.002 Brazil

Faxes: +55 85 277 2564 (if voice, ask for fax)

Secretary, Human Rights Secretariat

Exmo Sr. Secretário dos Direitos Humanos

Dr. José Gregori

Secretaria Nacional dos Direitos Humanos

Ministério da Justiça

Esplanada dos Ministérios

Bloco T, Anexo II, 2 Andar

Brasília DF, CEP 70064-900

Faxes: +55 61 225 0440 (if voice, ask for fax)

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 30 January 1998.