

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 19/001/2004

UA 12/04

Fear for Safety

09 January 2004

BRAZIL

**Indigenous peoples in Raposa Serra do Sol reservation
Missionaries in Raposa Serra do Sol and Boa Vista, Roraima State**

Settlers have invaded a Catholic mission in an indigenous reserve in Roraima State, in protest at government plans to guarantee the land to indigenous peoples. They held three missionaries hostage for three days, and reportedly subjected them to psychological torture and humiliation. Supporters of the settlers have threatened to kidnap and beat any other missionaries they see on the streets.

The settlers, who were apparently coordinated by local landowners, invaded the Surumu Catholic mission, in the Raposa Serra do Sol indigenous reserve, on 6 January 2004. They have blocked roads to indigenous communities in the area, and violent protests are continuing in several towns. Federal Police have tried to control the violence, but apparently do not have sufficient forces in the area to protect the community of Raposa Serra do Sol against further attacks.

The Minister of Justice announced on 23 December 2003 that presidential 'ratification' of the demarcation process to guarantee Raposa Serra do Sol as an indigenous reserve, pending since 1998, would finally take place. Indigenous peoples, including the Macuxi and Taurepang, have been campaigning for the demarcation of these lands for over 30 years. Amnesty International welcomes the Justice Minister's announcement, but fears that federal and state authorities will use the recent attacks to justify further delay to this process, condemning the indigenous communities to more violence. The previous long delays appear to have contributed to the systematic violence suffered by indigenous peoples during this period and allowed outsiders to illegally settle and mine this land.

On 2 January 2003 Aldo da Silva Mota, a leader of the Macuxi peoples, was killed in Raposa Serra do Sol. An initial autopsy, done locally, claimed he died of natural causes. However, following protests from indigenous groups a second autopsy was carried out in Brasilia which stated he had been shot in the head, while his hands were in the air, most probably when kneeling on the ground, indicating a probable execution-style killing. Though two farm workers, employed by a local politician, are suspected of involvement in the crime they were released due to lack of evidence. To this day nobody has been detained for the crime.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The long-running dispute over the Raposa Serra do Sol reservation has seen at least 12 indigenous people killed, while hundreds more have been beaten and their homes and livestock destroyed by local landowners, settlers and members of the military police. Over the years the state government and elements in the armed forces have reportedly tried everything to block the process of demarcation, including the support of illegal settlements in the area and the buildup of extensive rice plantations, which have damaged the local environment. Local politicians and landowners reportedly involved in extensive corruption scandals, presently under investigation by the Federal Police, have sought to co-opt some members of the indigenous community, allowing the authorities to dismiss attacks on tribal peoples as internal conflicts, an excuse all too often used by authorities unwilling to protect indigenous peoples.

Since the election of President Luis Inácio Lula da Silva the situation of indigenous peoples has apparently deteriorated. Across Brazil indigenous peoples have suffered systematic attacks and violence with apparent impunity. Twenty-three indigenous leaders were killed in **2003**, many as a result of their struggle to defend their land rights, a dramatic rise on killings from previous years. The Minister of Justice told Amnesty International's Secretary General in November 2003 that no indigenous people had been killed except in 'internal conflicts'.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Portuguese or your own language:

- urging the federal government to provide the necessary Federal Police forces to ensure the peaceful conclusion of all violent protests and the protection of all members of the Raposa Serra do Sol community;
- calling on the federal authorities to bring those responsible for organising and perpetrating the recent attacks on the mission at Sumuru, the threats against missionaries in Boa Vista and any other acts of violence during these recent protests, to justice;
- welcoming the federal government's announcement that it will 'ratify' the demarcation of Raposa Serra do Sol, and urging them not to allow these protests to further delay the process, which might only lead to more attacks against indigenous peoples in the area;
- calling on the federal authorities to complete the investigations into the killing of Aldo da Silva Mota, to make their findings public, and to bring all those responsible to justice;
- reminding the federal government that the protection of Brazil's indigenous population is its direct responsibility, and that as part of process to guarantee their safety the government should 'ratify' Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization protecting the rights of indigenous peoples.

APPEALS TO:

Minister of Justice

Exmo. Ministro da Justiça da República Federativa do Brasil
Dr. Márcio Thomaz Bastos
Ministério da Justiça
Esplanada dos Ministérios, Bloco T
70712-902 - Brasília - DF
Brazil

Fax: + 55 61 322 6817

E-mail: gabinete.mj@mj.gov.br

Salutation: Salutation: Vossa Excelência / Your Excellency

National Secretary for Human Rights

Exmo. Secretario Especial dos Direitos Humanos
Sr. Nilmário Miranda
Secretaria Especial dos Direitos Humanos
Esplanada dos Ministérios, Bloco T
70064-900 - Brasília - DF
Brazil

Fax: + 55 61 2232260

Salutation: Exmo Sr. Secretario / Dear Mr Secretary

Governor of State of Roraima

Exmo. Governador do Estado de Roraima
Sr. Francisco Flamarion Portela
Palácio Senador Hélio Campos
Praça do Centro Cívico, s/nº
69301-380 - Boa Vista - RR
Brazil

Fax: + 55 95 623 2440

E-mail: fflamarion@osite.com.br

Salutation: Vossa Excelência / Your Excellency

COPIES TO:

Conselho Indígena de Roraima (CIR)
Av. Sebastião Diniz, 1672,
69303-120 -São Vicente

Brazil

Email: cir@technet.com.br

Conselho Indigenista Missionario (CIMI)

SDS Ed. Venâncio III salas 309 a 314

70393-900 - Brasília - DF

Brazil

E-mail: cimi@embratel.net.br

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 20 February 2004.