

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 19/008/2004

UA 279/04 Fear for Safety / Death Threats / Unlawful Killings

05 October 2004

BRAZIL **Maria Joelma da Costa (f) – President of the Rural Worker’s Union (Sindicato dos Trabalhadores Rurais, STR), Rondon do Pará, Pará State and other members and workers of the union**

Killed **José Dutra da Costa (“Dezinho”) (m) – Rural trade union leader**
Ribamar Francisco dos Santos (m) – Rural trade unionist

In recent weeks, Maria Joelma da Costa, President of the Rural Worker’s Union (STR), in Rondon do Pará, Pará State, has received numerous anonymous telephone calls at her home and office. She has been threatened that she will be killed unless she stops her work defending rural workers. Her limited police protection was reportedly withdrawn on 2 October, which has left her completely exposed. Amnesty International is seriously concerned for her safety and that of her colleagues.

Maria Joelma has received repeated death threats since she took over presidency of the STR in mid-2002. Recently two of her colleagues have stopped working at STR following the threats and intimidation against her. On 6 February 2004, another colleague, Ribamar Francisco dos Santos, was shot and killed in front of his house. No one has been charged with his killing, which is believed to have been a direct result of his union activities.

Maria Joelma is the wife of former STR President José Dutra da Costa, known as “Dezinho”, who was killed by a hired gun-man on 21 November 2000 in front of their house. “Dezinho” had been receiving death threats since 1993. Although he continually reported these to the media and the authorities, no steps were taken to ensure his protection.

Immediately after “Dezinho’s” death, his killer was caught by neighbours and is still held in detention, pending trial. Though a judge ordered the arrest of intermediaries suspected of organising the killing they have not been detained. Following initial investigations, the landowner who is believed to have ordered the killing was detained and held for a number of days. However, he was soon released following the judge’s ruling that there was a lack of evidence against him. Amnesty International has received reports that four trials, in which the same landowner was charged with ordering other killings, were suspended when documents related to the cases “disappeared” from the court house.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The state of Pará is afflicted by endemic violence, corruption and impunity. Slave labour is also commonly used. Much of the violence in the region is generated by conflicts over land ownership. Over the years Amnesty International has documented hundred of killings of land activists, such as the massacre of 19 landless peasants by military police in El Dorado dos Cárajás in 1996. In the vast majority of cases, those responsible for ordering and executing such killings go unpunished. (See UA 307/02, AMR 19/027/2002, 14 October 2002; UA 303/01, AMR 19/030/2001, 29 November 2001; UA 134/00, AMR 19/013/00, 25 May 2000 and follow-up AMR 19/019/00, 25 July 2000). According to the Pastoral Land Commission, In 2003, 53 rural activists were killed between January and September across the country, while only five people were imprisoned for 976 such killings committed between 1985 and 1996.

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

- urging the authorities to take immediate steps to ensure the safety of Maria Joelma da Costa and all members of the Sindicato de Trabalhadores Rurais (STR) in Rondon do Pará, Pará State;
- calling on the authorities to initiate an independent and transparent investigation into the death threats against her and to bring to justice all those found responsible;

- asking the authorities to make public all investigations and criminal proceedings in relation to the killing of José Dutra da Costa and Ribamar Francisco dos Santos, and urging them to ensure that those responsible are brought to justice;
- expressing your concern at reports that numerous legal documents relating to killings of rural union leaders and activists in Rondon do Pará have "disappeared" from the local court, resulting in the suspension of various trials;
- enquiring what steps the authorities are taking to end the long history of killings, violence and attacks against land activists and human rights defenders in Pará state.

APPEALS TO:

State Governor, Pará

Exmo. Governador do Estado do Pará
Sr. Simão Robison Oliveira Jatene
Palácio dos Despachos
Rodovia Augusto Montenegro, Km 9
66823-010, Belém - PA
Brasil

Fax: + 55 91 248 0133

Salutation: Vossa Excelência / Your Excellency

State Secretary for Social Defence

Secretário Especial de Defesa Social
Mancel Santino Nascimento Júnior
Avenida Nazaré, 871
66035-170, Belém – PA, Brasil

Fax: + 55 91 3084 3635 (If someone answers say "Fax, por favor")

Salutation: Exmo. Sr Secretário / Dear Secretary

State Public Prosecutor's Office

Procurador-Geral de Justiça Estado do Pará
Francisco Barbosa
Procuradoria-Geral de Justiça
Rua João Diogo, 100 - Comércio
66015-160, Belém – PA, Brasil

Fax: + 55 91 223 3585 / 224 7198

Salutation: Exmo Sr Procurador-Geral / Dear Attorney General

Federal Human Rights Secretary

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

Fax: + 55 61 223 2260 / 226 2971

Salutation: Exmo. Sr Secretário / Dear Secretary

COPIES TO

Rural Worker's Union Rondon do Pará

Sindicato dos Trabalhadores Rurais, Rondon do Pará
Rua Minas Gerais 823
Centro, 68638-000, Rondon do Pará- PA, Brasil

President of Pará State Justice Tribunal

Maria de Nazareth Brabo de Souza
Presidente do Tribunal de Justiça do Estado do Pará
Tribunal de Justiça do Estado do Pará

Rua Tomázia Perdigão 310, Cidade Velha
66015 -260 Belém, PA, Brasil

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 16 November 2004.