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BRAZIL: INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATION CRUCIAL IN LATEST MASS KILLING OF
LANDLESS PEASANTS

Amnesty International condemned this week's apparent excessive use of force by military police against demonstrators in the Brazilian state of Para, and is calling for guarantees that investigations into the incident will be conducted independently.

At least 20 people were killed when military police opened fire late on Wednesday 17 April while attempting to disperse demonstrators near the town of Eldorado do Carajas, about 430 miles (692km) south of Belem, capital of Para state

"A full and independent investigation is crucial in order to bring those responsible for these killings to justice," said an Amnesty International staff member accompanying the investigation in Para state, northern Brazil.

"This appears to be part of a pattern of violence against land-rights demonstrators by military police which is supported by a climate of impunity."

Amnesty International is calling for a full and independent investigation. This should include independent forensic examination of the dead and wounded by a body which is separate from the police force involved. The Brazilian authorities should take immediate steps to ensure that sufficient federal investigators are brought in to the area and that they are able to collect, store and protect evidence without hindrance or intimidation.

Around 2,000 landless peasants connected to the *Movimento de Trabalhadores Rurais Sem terra* (MST) Movement for Landless Rural Workers were blockading a road. Some reports state that demonstrators threw stones at police, and that some of them may have been armed with handguns. Twenty bodies were recovered and 40 people are reported wounded, including five policeman.

Amnesty International is concerned at reports that some corpses display bullet wounds to the head, indicating that unlawful killings may have been carried out. The organization has also received reports that a number of demonstrators are missing.

The MST campaigns for land reform by organizing demonstrations and land occupations in many states throughout Brazil. Amnesty International has been monitoring a recent increase in violent confrontations between police and the MST, and has repeatedly expressed its concern at the frequent reports of excessive use of force by military police. For example, in August 1995, six peasants were killed by military police in Corumbiara, Rondônia State. Amnesty International has expressed concern about the removal of evidence.

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