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@Ill-treatment of landless peasants in the state of Paraná

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Amnesty International has received reports that at least 13 people were seriously injured during a violent confrontation between squatter peasants (*posseiros*) belonging to the *Movimento de Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* (MST), Movement for Landless Rural Workers, and military police on 8 November 1995 in the municipality of Santa Isabel do Ivaí, the state of Paraná.

The Confrontation

The confrontation reportedly involved some 90 military police officers from the Eighth Paranavaí Military Police Battalion armed with rifles, pistols, clubs and tear gas, and approximately 50 families armed with bottles and scythes. The toll of the injured included 13 peasants with serious injuries from gunshots to their legs and feet. One peasant had to be taken to an intensive care unit at the local hospital to receive treatment after he was shot in the stomach. Several days after the conflict another peasant, Pedro Lopes dos Santos, who was initially reported as "disappeared", was found in the state capital of Curitiba and was placed in intensive care at the Evangelical Hospital (*Hospital Evangélico*) also to be treated for serious injuries. Allegedly another 25 peasants, amongst them women and children, suffered serious bruising and cuts. Although press reports in the media stated that six policemen were also wounded, these reports were never confirmed by the parliamentary delegation that visited the site of the conflict.

According to a report written by the Special Commission (Comissão Especial) of the Legislative Assembly of the state of Paraná that visited the site of the confrontation on the 9 November 1995, "the action taken by the military police was violent, rash and pre-planned" ("*a ação da Polícia Militar foi violenta, precipitada e planejada*").

In its report the Commission describes the case of victim José Pedro Rodem, aged 45, who received "various wounds to the head, gunshot wounds in both feet, and grazes on his back". Wilson Braum, aged 20, was wounded in the knee by gunshots, and suffered abrasions and bruising to other parts of the body. The report states that Wilson Braum claimed that he, "was shot at after he was handcuffed and thrown to the ground" ("*fui atirado após estar alegemado e jogado no chão*"). There are disturbing reports that several of the peasants were beaten and shot at after they were handcuffed. In addition, witnesses allege that women, children and the elderly were beaten and trodden over.

On 9 November 1995, the Commission delegates visited the peasant's roadside encampment and the Fazenda Saudade, the estate that the peasants were eventually hoping to live on. The encampment still smelt of burnt tents which had allegedly been set on fire by the police officers. Witnesses claimed that domestic utensils, tools, furniture, mattresses, radios, cooking pots and other objects belonging to the peasants were collected up, set on fire and destroyed.

The families had previously been at a site some 200 kilometres away before they moved to Fazenda Saudade. According to a spokesman for the *Movimento de Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* (MST), the peasants were camped on the roadside waiting to take up land on the Fazenda Saudade that had already been declared suitable for agrarian reform in March 1995 by the government. On 6 November 1995 the peasants learnt of a preliminary verdict of repossession¹ (eviction) ordered by the local judge on behalf of the Department of Roads and Highways (*Departamento de Estradas e Rodagem - DER*), a state organ responsible for roads. The next day the peasants decided to move their camp off the road and on to Fazenda Saudade in order to avoid being evicted as a consequence of the repossession order to remove them from the road. However, the court had also authorized an eviction order on behalf of the estate owner and on 8 November the military police carried out the eviction.

The Special Commission's Conclusions

The following is a translation of extracts from the conclusions of the report written by the Special Commission of the Legislative Assembly of the State of Paraná sent to record the events that took place in the municipality of Santa Isabel do Ivaí, Paraná, November 1995.

"The Interparty Commission concluded that the action of the military police was violent, rash and pre-planned. Principally the eviction responded to the interests of the owner of the Fazenda Saudade. In what is a rare incident in the state of Paraná, the state bureau requested the eviction of the families of the landless rural workers camped on the roadside thereby ceding to pressure from the estate owner. The judiciary passed a verdict extremely quickly and the military police, supplied with arsenal including arms of high calibre and chemical weaponry (teargas) were also

¹ A *liminar* - preliminary verdict, is a summary preventive measure taken by a judge, before ruling on the full merits of the case.

mobilized with haste.

There was no preliminary negotiation involving parts of the state government of Paraná, such as the Environment Secretary, the Agricultural Secretary, the Secretary for Justice or the Legislative Assembly.

At a time when the government of the state has affirmed its willingness to resolve social conflicts in a civilized way, without police force, such a barbaric episode sadly stuns Paraná and Brazilian society. Without the consent of Governor Jaime Lerner, the Secretary of State Security carried out the eviction in an extremely violent way, attacking the landless rural workers as though they were vandals.

...The tendency of the authorities to criminalize the workers for being workers, just shows their premeditation to distort the real facts about what happened. At no time were the human rights of the families taken into account. The state government gave full powers to a military police captain to resolve such a serious social conflict. The issue was treated as though it were exclusively under the jurisdiction of the Secretariat of Public Security, in a simplistic way that revealed a complete lack of sensitivity and police training."

Movimento de Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST)

Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra campaigns for land reform by organizing demonstrations and land occupations in many states throughout Brazil. Reportedly, the number of families occupying land has risen by almost 25 percent in recent months. On 30 October 1995 Deolinda Alves de Souza and Márcio Barreto members of MST were arrested in the state of São Paulo and charged with forming a *quadrilha*, a gang. MST leaders and lawyers involved in the case believe that these arrests were politically motivated and intended to pressurize MST into halting all land occupations.

Violent Land Confrontations

Such land occupations have frequently resulted in violent confrontations between peasants and military police officers and there are frequent reports of excessive use of force, ill-treatment, torture and extrajudicial executions by Military Police in Brazil against squatter peasants (*posseiros*) trying to obtain land to farm. In one of the worst incidents to occur to date in 1995, ten peasants and two policemen were killed and over 170 people injured on 9 August when military police and private gunmen carried out an eviction order on the estate Santa Elina, Corumbiara, Rondônia.

Government Land Reform Program

Following the confrontation in the municipality of Santa Isabel do Ivaí, state of Paraná, President Fernando Henrique Cardoso is reported to have signed decrees expropriating 250,000 acres of land from privately held estates, promising that the land will be used to resettle more than 3,600 families waiting for places to live and land to farm. At a ceremony in Brasília the President is

reported to have said, "I have seen with great pain scenes that I would not like to see again...Molotov cocktails are not an instrument of agrarian reform....the Government will neither encourage nor permit attitudes like that."

Amnesty International is concerned about the reports of violence, in particular reports that people were wounded by bullets fired at them after they had been handcuffed, used by agents of the state against landless peasant families whilst carrying out land eviction orders. Amnesty International calls upon the state government of Paraná to open a full and impartial investigation into the confrontation on 8 November 1995 in the municipality of Santa Isabel do Ivaí, and to bring those responsible for human rights violations to justice.

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