

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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UA 393/93 Death Threats

5 November 1993

BRAZIL Bishop Pedro Casaldáliga, working with indigenous people

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of Bishop Pedro Casaldáliga, from the diocese of São Felix do Araguaia, Mato Grosso state, Brazil, following reports of threats against his life.

According to information received by Amnesty International, Bishop Casaldáliga, who is internationally known for his work on behalf of the poor in the Amazon, has been advised by an anonymous person that local landowners have contracted a gunman to kill him in revenge for his defence of the land rights of the Xavante indigenous people of the region.

The Xavantes are claiming their rights to the land of a local estate, the *fazenda Suia Missu*, from which they were evicted in the 1960s. The estate is currently owned by an Italian oil company and illegally occupied by land invaders and squatters, *posseiros*. Bishop Casaldáliga supported the Xavantes' claim to the land, although he also stressed that genuine squatters should be relocated. In September 1993, following the decision by the Italian company to agree in principle to return the land to the Xavantes, the Brazilian Minister of Justice issued a resolution acknowledging the *fazenda Suia Missu* as an indigenous area. The ministerial resolution angered land invaders and local landowners who hold the Bishop responsible for it. Reportedly his church has been daubed with paint and rumours began to circulate about his impending assassination.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Land disputes are an endemic source of violence in Brazil. Land rights are central for the social, economic, cultural and political survival of Brazil's indigenous people. In practice these rights have been ignored by land claimants who have abducted and killed Indians to drive them off land sought for the wealth of its resources. Indians who attempt to claim their constitutional rights and people who support and advise them are in the gravest danger of becoming victims of human rights abuses. Amnesty International takes no side in disputes over land. What concerns the organization is the persistent failure of successive governments to protect the fundamental human rights of Brazil's indigenous peoples. The authorities at all levels have failed to effectively protect the Indians and people working on their behalf or to bring to justice those responsible for killing, abducting, harassing and threatening them. As a result human rights abuses continue with impunity.

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

- Expressing concern for the physical safety of Bishop Pedro Casaldáliga,

following reports of threats against his life;

- calling for a thorough investigation into the death threats against Bishop Pedro Casaldáliga and that those responsible be brought to justice;

- urging that all necessary steps be taken to ensure the physical safety of Bishop Pedro Casaldáliga.

APPEALS TO

1) State Governor, Mato Grosso

Exmo Sr Governador do Estado de Mato Grosso

Sr Jaime Campos

Palácio Paiguas

Centro Político e Administrativo

78.000 Cuiabá

Mato Grosso, Brazil

Telegrams: Senhor Governador, Mato Grosso, Brazil

Salutation: Vossa Excelência

2) State Secretary for Public Security, Mato Grosso

Exmo Sr Secretário de Segurança Pública Estado de Mato Grosso

Sr Oscar Travassos

Centro Político Administrativo

78.000 - Cuiabá

Mato Grosso, Brazil

Telegrams: Secretario de Segurança Publica, Mato Grosso, Brazil

Salutation: Sr Secretário / Mr Secretary

3) Minister of Justice

Ministro da Justiça

Exmo Sr Maurício Corrêa

Esplanada dos Ministérios, Bloco 23

70.064 Brasília, D.F., Brazil

Telegrams: Ministro Justiça, Brasília, Brazil

Faxes: + (4461) 321 51 45

Telexes: 611003 MNJU Br, 611088 MNJU BR or 6122313 MNJUBR

Salutation: Vossa Excelência / Your Excellency

COPIES OF YOUR APPEAL TO:

Pastoral Land Commission

Comissão Pastoral da Terra

Rua 20 No. 251, Centro

Caixa Postal 749

74.000 Goiania, Goias, Brazil

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 17 December 1993.