

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PUBLIC STATEMENT

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### **Brazil: Ruling strikes blow against impunity for violence against Indigenous peoples**

A first step towards justice has been taken for the family of indigenous leader Marcos Veron, who was brutally beaten to death while defending rights to Guarani-Kaiowá ancestral lands. But much more remains to be done.

On 25 February, a São Paulo court found Estevão Romero, Carlos Roberto dos Santos and Jorge Cristaldo Insabralde guilty of torture, kidnapping and formation of an armed criminal gang and sentenced them to 12 years and three months in prison. Carlos Roberto dos Santos was, however, acquitted of homicide and all three will appeal their sentences in liberty.

Although not the landmark ruling the Guarani-Kaiowa had hoped for, after years of impunity for violence committed against Indigenous people it represents a crucial first step. The prosecutions send a strong message that attacks against Indigenous peoples will no longer be tolerated and increases the likelihood of future prosecutions.

A further 24 men, including the owner of the farm in which Veron was killed, have been indicted in Mato Grosso do Sul. If true justice is to be done, these cases must be brought before the courts as soon as possible.

In January 2003, 73-year-old Marcos Veron, who had led the peaceful reoccupation of his ancestral land, was attacked by a group of around 30 men, and struck in the head with rifle butt as he lay on the ground. He died later of cranial trauma. His case has become emblematic of the violence suffered by the Guarani-Kaiowá in their pursuit of their constitutional land rights.

Mato Grosso do Sul remains the focal point of violence and discrimination against indigenous peoples in Brazil. Over the past year the Guarani-Kaiowá communities of Y'poí, Ita'y Ka'aguyrusu and Kurusú Ambá in the south of the state have been harassed and attacked by hired gunmen. In spite of efforts on the part of federal prosecutors to speed up the recognition of the rights of Indigenous Peoples to traditional lands, the process remains stalled.

Federal authorities must now redouble their efforts to push forward with long overdue land demarcations. Failure to demarcate lands is putting countless communities at risk of further abuses.

Amnesty International is also urging the authorities to undertake thorough and independent investigations into the activities of private security firms which have long operated with impunity and been implicated in countless acts of violence and intimidation against Indigenous peoples.

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