

Slave Employer Fined US\$ 1.2 Million in Brazil

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Brazil's 2nd Labor Court of the city of Marabá (Pará state), in the Amazonian region, ordered today the Lima Araújo Agricultural company to pay a fine of US\$ 1.21 million (3 million reais) for enslaving around 180 workers.

The firm even kept the workers living in corrals. The fine for collective moral damages is the biggest one ever determined by Brazilian courts in cases such as this.

The judgment can still be appealed, but, if it is upheld, the money will go to the Workers' Assistance Fund (Fundo de Amparo ao Trabalhador, FAT).

This unprecedented ruling was made by Judge Jorge Ramos Vieira in a public civil suit brought by the Public Ministry of Labor Defense.

In addition to the fine, the judge sentenced the Lima Araújo company to obey certain rules to avoid the practice of slavery.

Among them, signing employees' working papers and ceasing to discount 25% of their salaries for food expenses.

"The company will immediately have its bank and fiscal confidentiality broken, its property blocked, and US\$ 1.21 million in its owners bank accounts preventively impounded," says the prosecutor, Loris Rocha Pereira.

In 2004, an agreement between the Public Ministry of Labor Defense, the Labor court system, and the Jorge Mutran company resulted in the collection of a US\$ 400 thousand (1.3 million reais) indemnity payment for the practice of slave labor. The firm maintained workers under slave-like labor conditions on a farm in Marabá.

Secretariat of Labor Inspection advisor Marcelo Campos says that 200 workers were set free this week in the south of the state of Pará and 30 in the north of the state of Tocantins.

"In general, slave workers are those subjected to a system of indebtedness by listing everything they need to feed themselves in order to work. Through this process they are prevented from leaving the property, be it through indebtedness or violence suffered at the hands of the owner or his hirelings."

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