

Human Rights Groups Urge Federalization of Rural Crimes in Brazil's Amazon

Contributed by Lana Cristina
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With the report, "Violation of Human Rights in the Amazon," the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT, Comissão Pastoral da Terra), Global Justice, and the Land of Rights intend to draw attention to the impunity surrounding crimes linked to agrarian disputes in the state of Pará, in the Brazilian Amazon.

In the document the organizations make recommendations such as federalization of uninvestigated crimes, federalization of the crime of using slave-like labor and more effective action on the part of federal government organs such as IBAMA (Brazilian Institute of the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources) and INCRA (National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform).

They also urge participation by the Federal Police in the apprehension of hired gunmen and authors of crimes as occurred in the case of the murder of the US-born missionary, Sister Dorothy Stang.

The organizations that prepared the document accuse the state government of being negligent about land disputes involving human rights violations in Pará.

"The Military Police and Civil Police act on behalf of the interests of the landowners, against the workers. The courts also always rule invariably in favor of the landowners and squatters, even when we know that the latter present phony land deeds.

"About a month ago, the police commissioner sent by the state government to Dream Castle ("Castelo dos Sonhos"), an extremely embattled area, left after spending six months there, claiming there was no danger at all. The area was a garden of tranquility, according to him," said Darci Frigo, a lawyer for the Land of Rights organization.

The report on human rights violations in the Amazon will be submitted to federal government executive, judicial, and legislative authorities, as well as to the United Nations (UN) and the Organization of American States' (OAS) Inter-American Human Rights Commission.

"We are sending it to these international bodies, because we are cognizant of their influence on the federal government when they call for firm attitudes in cases like this.

"In fact, the cases of the Eldorado dos Carajás massacre and Sister Dorothy's murder only reached the courts, with the names of the authors of the crimes, because there were international repercussions," says José Afonso Batista, a national coordinator of the CPT.

On December 9 and 10, when Stang's murderers will face a jury trial, the CPT, Global Justice, and the Land of Rights will use the opportunity to deliver the report to state government authorities in Pará.

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