

18 Leaders Have Been Killed in Pará, Brazil, Since US Nun's Murder in 2005

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On 12 February 2005, Sister Dorothy Stang was assassinated for defending the rights of rural workers in the Amazon. For more than 30 years, she had campaigned against the human rights abuses and environmental degradation that continue to plague Pará state as the interests of the forest-dwelling communities are disregarded in favor of land-grabbers, ranchers and loggers.

But despite the huge international attention her death garnered for the plight of both the Amazon rainforest and the communities that depend on it for their survival, the Brazilian government have failed to act on their own commitments to safeguard the region from indiscriminate logging.

Immediately following her death, the government announced the creation of a mosaic of Conservation Units. However, these have still not been implemented and illegal logging continues unabated. For many of these units, all the legal procedures have been completed but they still await the signature of the President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

772 land dispute murders since 1972

"The creation and implementation of protected areas are important to stop land grabbing, deforestation and the violence related to illegal land occupation and environmental destruction in the Amazon," said André Muggiati, Greenpeace Amazon Campaigner, in Anapu.

The government also promised to implement two Social Development Projects to assist the local communities but less than half of the 200 families who have been promised land reform grants have actually received them. Meanwhile, the areas marked out for the development projects are still being destroyed by loggers.

And the violence continues. Since Sister Dorothy's death, a further 18 community leaders have been assassinated in Pará. According to a report published by Brazilian NGOs CPT (the Pastoral Land Commission), Global Justice and Terra de Direitos, out of the 772 murders related to land disputes since Sister Dorothy began campaigning in 1972, only eight have gone to trial. A further 48 people are currently living under death threats.

To highlight the lack of action on the part of the Brazilian government, Greenpeace activists, along with other environmental and human rights advocates and members of the local community, chose the anniversary of Sister Dorothy's death to erect hundreds of crosses to commemorate those who have lost their lives or have received death threats due to land disputes.

It's clear that, despite their promises to the contrary, only continued pressure on the Brazilian government and the logging industry will prevent further bloodshed in the Amazon and allow the forest communities to live in peace.

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