

Brazilian Bishop Accuses Lula of Being Afraid of Big Farmers

Contributed by Keite Camacho
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Brazilian Catholic Bishop Don Thomas Balduino, counselor to the Land Pastoral Commission (CPT), said, this Tuesday, April 18, that impunity is the main reason that rural violence persists. He was referring to the fact that at least 38 assassinations occurred in 2005 due to rural conflicts.

There were 39 in 2004. "That means that impunity is permitting violence to advance," he observed. The data are from the book, *Conflicts in the Countryside - Brazil 2005*, launched by the CPT at the Brazilian National Bishops' Conference (CNBB).

According to Balduino, these conflicts have increased during president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's administration.

"The explanation is that the group of people linked to land struggle movements believed that the time was ripe for agrarian reform, because it was Lula," he said.

"However, they came up against the barriers of agribusiness and the violence of traditional large landholdings, which reacted using their own means. The government does not wish to confront those who claim to be owners of the land, since they are powerful," he judged.

Don Balduino criticized the current process of agrarian reform for being "unsatisfactory and very slow." He added that what is expanding in Brazil "with full force and every kind of incentive is agribusiness."

In relation to the 64 conflict-related deaths registered last year, he believes that they are related to labor issues, such as the situation of sugarcane workers, for example, who "are obliged to compete with machines in order to continue working and keep the machines from substituting them."

In his assessment, this competition has led to the death of individuals "who don't eat adequately for the forced labor they perform." "It is a form of slave labor," he pointed out.

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