

Brazil: Accomplice in Killing of US Nun Gets 18 Years in Jail

Contributed by I.L.
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An Amazon farmer was sentenced to 18 years in prison for his role in the murder of an American nun, who he said was killed at the behest of two ranchers angered by her opposition to plans to log a disputed patch of rain forest.

A Brazilian judge sentenced Amair Feijoli da Cunha, 38, on Wednesday for his part in the killing of rain forest defender Dorothy Stang.

Sister Stang, 73, was shot to death in February 2005, near the town of Anapu in northern Brazil. She was a well-known activist for rain forest preservation.

The American missionary was shot on a muddy stretch of road deep in the heart of the Amazon following a long-running dispute with ranchers over a patch of forest they wanted to log and then convert into pasture land. She wanted to have the land declared as a sustainable development reserve.

Feijoli told a jury he offered money to two men to shoot the nun on February 12, 2005 at the behest of two ranchers, Vitalmiro Moura and Regivaldo Galvão. The ranchers have been charged with Stang's killing, but legal maneuvering has kept their cases from coming to trial.

The sentencing capped a daylong trial in which jury members rejected defense claims that Feijoli was forced to hire the gunmen by the ranchers who threatened his life and to whom he owed money.

"We couldn't ask for anything better," said David Stang, the victim's brother, who traveled from his home near Colorado Springs to attend the trial.

He called the sentence "an important piece," but said he still wanted the ranchers' cases to be decided quickly and for them to be held in jail until they face a jury.

David Stang, 63, was joined by his sisters Marguerite Hohm, 73, and Mary Heil, 77.

Born in Dayton, Ohio, Stang spent the last 23 years of her life in the remote jungle town of Anapu, in the northern state of Pará, where she defended the rain forest and poor settlers who lived there.

Her killing evoked comparisons with rain-forest defender Chico Mendes, who was shot in 1988 in the western Amazon state of Acre.

Feijoli testified that Galvão told him: "Until we put an end to this woman, we won't have peace on these lands."

He said Galvão told him to offer US\$ 24,000 to kill Stang. Feijoli said Moura supplied the .38 caliber revolver used in the killing.

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