

Brazil: Conviction of US Nun's Murderer Thrown Out of Court

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Just last October, Brazilian Rayfran das Neves Sales, self-confessed killer of American missionary Dorothy Stang was sentenced to 27 years in prison. The Supreme Court of the Pará state, in northern Brazil, has annulled however that decision on Monday, December 17, ruling that Sales has the right to a third trial.

The state's Supreme Court (TJ) decided for the annulment based on a petition by Sales's lawyer, who claims that his client had his defense curtailed and that the jury included people who had been vetoed by the defense. Pará's justice will not schedule a new trial before the end of the year.

Since the early 70s Sister Dorothy had dedicated her life to poor Brazilians and ended up getting her Brazilian citizenship. The outspoken religious woman had received several threats from land owners and loggers throughout the years. Stang was killed with nine shots on February 12, 2005, at age 73.

Sales, also known by the nickname of Fogoió, said that he was the one who point blank shot the missionary six times in Anapu, in the southwest of Pará. The nun, who for decades worked with rural workers, was trying to establish a sustainable development project that would help peasants in the region using public land. This apparently bothered big farmers, who are accused of deforestation and land grabbing.

In a first trial, in December 2005, Sales was also condemned and sentenced to 27 years of jail, but was automatically granted a new jury trial because his sentence was over 20 years in prison.

Since his sentencing the gunman has been kept in a maximum security penitentiary in metropolitan Belém, capital of Pará state. He's been jailed together with Vitalmiro Moura, Amair Feijoli da Cunha and Clodoaldo Carlos Batista, all of whom are also involved in the missionary's murder.

Moura, 36, was sentenced to the maximum term of 30 years in prison for having paid gunmen Sales and Batista to kill the American missionary. Farmer Regivaldo Galvão, the Taradão (Big Sex Maniac), is the only one who hasn't been put on trial yet.

In October, Sales confessed that he had killed the nun, but denied that he had been hired by farmers to murder her. He killed her, he said, because the American missionary had threatened him when he went to plant grass in a land, known as lot 55, in Anapu. Stang wanted to use the place for settling poor peasants.

The District Attorney claims that farmers Galvão and Moura paid 50,000 reais (US\$ 28,000) for the contract killing of the nun.

