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ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Joint written statement* submitted by Franciscans International, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status, Pax Christi International, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status, and FIAN - Foodfirst Information and Action Network, a non-governmental organization on the Roster

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[23 January 2002]

*This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

Brazil

THE TERROR THAT COMES FROM THE LAND

The worst attitudes that a country can take, in relation to its tragedies, are that of indifference and connivance. The indifference and connivance with which the Brazilian government is treating the persistent and growing series of rural assassinations, particularly in the south and southeast of the Brazilian state of Pará, is astonishing. In 2001, eight rural workers have already been murdered in the region by private militiamen who work for the large ranchers. Because the situation is so alarming, a delegation of representatives of the Commission of Human Rights of the Brazilian Congress, the Council of Defence of the Rights of the Human Person (Ministry of Justice), and the Federal Attorney's Office for Citizen's Rights, visited the region on the 4th and 5th of October 2001. They attended public hearings and attempted to collect more detailed information on the situation. On the 5th October, while the commission was still in the region, two more rural workers were assassinated. It was as if the landowners were affirming: "We're the ones who give orders around here".

Between 1971 and 2001 there have been 706 murders in Para, with 534 of these murders having been in the south and southeast parts of the state. From 1995 to 2001, 90 rural workers were murdered in the same region. The background of all these cases is land conflict. The people murdered or under threat are struggling to retain their economic, social and cultural rights, especially the right to adequate food, which includes access to productive resources.

Additionally, a list of 27 rural leaders known to be marked for murder has already been delivered on two occasions, to Sette Câmara, the Secretary of Public Safety. He so far did not take any precautions. Eldorado das Carajás massacre is one particular case which shows with clarity the level of impunity that has been achieved. It was said that 19 rural workers were killed on the order of governor Almir Gabriel's. The person responsible for the execution of the order was, according to our information, Colonel Pantoja, commander of the State Police. In the judgement, reached in 2000, the governor was not even indicted and the military commanders were all acquitted. This fact demonstrates that the police and the gunmen "dress in the same uniform".

The assassinations are not the only form of violence in the area. The private militias, with the connivance of the Civil Police, spread terror by carrying out violent land evictions, kidnappings, beating, and torture. One incident that proves the co-agency of the police and the hired gunmen is the event on September 21, when employees of the ranch 'Reunidas' were stopped while transporting an arsenal of heavy calibre weapons. They admitted that the weapons belonged to the ranch. In the police station, one of those held in custody presented a personalized card of the Chief of the State Police and said "this is the man that will help us". They were released the same day.

The violence in the area also takes the form of slave labour, which has become worse last year. From January 1 to September 23, 2001, 968 rural workers were counted as being in conditions of slave labour on 16 ranches in the south and southeastern parts of Pará. In 2000, 369 victims of slave labour were registered. It is worth emphasizing that the Brazilian Department of Labour estimates that for each worker freed from slave labour conditions, there exist three more in slavery.

The government, however, hasn't responded to the situation. Neither has Brazilian society in general responded to and in fact has shown itself to be insensitive to the situation. In this sense, the words of

the National Conference of Brazilian Bishops (CNBB), the National Council of Christian Churches (CONIC), and the Brazilian Lawyers Organization (OAB), were prophetic when they withdrew from negotiations that were held last year between the Federal Government and the Movement of Landless Rural Workers (MST), sounding the alarm to president Fernando Henrique Cardoso and his ministers: "Intolerance can influence behaviour as well as public opinion in a manner that favours violence and repression". Thus, crime pays, impunity is guaranteed, and landowners, as well as the gunmen and policemen who work for them, can celebrate their crimes in peace.

The situation is worsened by the federal government's position as seen in the following example: The Federal Minister of Agrarian Development, Raul Jungmann, attempts to nullify the situation of violence against the rural workers by affirming that crimes are not motivated by land disputes, but from "personal conflicts". This opens the door of impunity for the executioners. This type of attitude does not fit in a society that is intended to be democratic. This loss of values echoes through the whole of society and makes the population believe -with good reason- that justice does not exist, and that the State is a useless institution.

We recommend that the UN Human Rights Commission take adequate measures to address the situation.

National Coordination of the Pastoral Land Commission
