



COMITÊ BRASILEIRO DE DEFENSORAS E DEFENSORES DE DIREITOS HUMANOS

Open Letter from the Brazilian Human Rights Defenders Committee

Deaths foretold in Brazil: 2017

Assembled between September 13th and 15th 2017 in Brasília/DF, during the III National Seminar on Human Rights Defender Protection (*Fronteiras de Luta*), the **Brazilian Human Rights Defenders Committee**, comprised of civil society organizations, social leaders and movements, hereby raises a public alert about a serious scenario of worsening foretold violence and murders that is affecting the lives of those who defend human rights in Brazil.

The year 2017 began with the worsening of the situation of Federal Government dismantling of public policies and the approval of a set of laws confirming the project of abandonment and violence in relation to the population's human rights. In the face of this, so far this year there have already been 62 murders and countless complaints of threats, murder attempts and intimidation of leaders and activists.

The Committee considers that the prior identification of these serious conflicts is of extreme importance and enables the possibility of effective intervention in order to avoid the worsening of human rights violations, such as murders and massacres, as in the case of the Pau D'Arco massacre (state of Pará), the Colniza massacre (Mato Grosso), the attack on the Gamela indigenous people (Maranhão) and the serious situation in the state of Rondônia.

As such, in order to avoid new murders and massacres, the Committee and the social movements and organizations that comprise it hereby denounce the situations of injustice and put themselves forward as allies in conflict medication, demanding that the public authorities **URGENTLY** adopt effective measures to resolve them, as well as to ensure the protection of human rights defenders and their families in Brazil.

It is with great concern that we present below 15 situations of deaths foretold in Brazil in 2017:

- ✓ **Mato Grosso.** *Raimundo Viera III Settlement (Plot 10) - Gleba Gama, located in the municipality of Nova Guarita. Community fears attacks and murders. After several threats and gunfire, a settlement couple was tortured and held in captivity.*
- ✓ **Pará.** *Marabá. Hugo Chavez Encampment. Landless families terrorized by gunmen.*
- ✓ **Rondônia.** *Municipalities of Ariquemes and Theobroma. Threat of eviction puts the lives of families at the Canaã occupation at risk.*

- ✓ **Maranhão.** Municipality of Viana. Following an attack that left more than 20 wounded, Gamela indigenous people endure gunfire, threats and continue to be at risk of being murdered.
- ✓ **Maranhão.** Municipality of Araioses – Lower Parnaíba. The family of Zé Menino, a fisherman murdered in July this year, is also at risk of being murdered at the Ilha da Croa Community.
- ✓ **Mato Grosso do Sul.** Guarani-Kaiowá indigenous peoples continue to be attacked and threatened.
- ✓ **Bahia.** Serra do Padeiro, municipality of Ilhéus. Chief Babau and leaders of the Tupinambá indigenous people continue to be victims of murder attempts and threats.
- ✓ **Bahia.** Municipality of Lençóis. Following the massacre that claimed the lives of 6 youths, the Iúna Quilombola Community continues to live with threats and risk of new attacks.
- ✓ **Bahia.** The Rio dos Macacos Quilombola Community suffers beatings, torture and threats in the rural area between the municipalities of Salvador and Simões Filho.
- ✓ **Amazonas.** Massacred isolated indigenous peoples known as Flecheiros (Archers) warn that they are at risk of being exterminated.
- ✓ **Amazonas.** Manaus. Woman housing rights defender suffers death threats.
- ✓ **Minas Gerais.** Municipality of Almenara, Jequitinhonha Valley region. Tension increases among the Marobá dos Teixeira Community following violence against quilombola people.
- ✓ **Rio de Janeiro.** Defenders of the human rights of shanty town (favela) movement militants are made victims of security force actions involving kidnapping, attacks and intimidation.
- ✓ **Paraná.** Curitiba. LGBTI rights defenders are persecuted and threatened by fundamentalists and neo-nazis.
- ✓ **Federal District.** Zilda Xavier Settlement in Planaltina/DF. Coordinator of the right to housing movement is a victim of murder attempt and his work becomes restricted owing to continuing threats.

All these cases are described in greater detail below and have been formally reported on various occasions to the appropriate public authorities. We consider that these are extremely serious situations that point to imminent deaths. We urge for measures to be taken, with the aim of seeking to ensure the lives and integrity of these people and families who are human rights defenders.

Brasília/DF, September 15th 2017.

Brazilian Human Rights Defenders Committee

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Deaths foretold in Brazil: 2017

1. Rural Workers

1.1 Community fears attacks and murders. After several threats and gunfire, a settlement couple was tortured and held in captivity

*Mato Grosso. Raimundo Viera III Settlement
(Plot 10) - Gleba Gama, located in the
municipality of Nova Guarita - MT*

Settlement families live under constant threats and violence, ranging from death threats, torture, being held in captivity, houses being set on fire, fences being cut, poisoning through aerial spraying of pesticides, discharging of firearms against houses and vehicles. Diverse complaints and formal reports have been filed with the state's military and civil police. Those responsible are thought to be members of the Braga family which has interest in the area. Despite complaints filed with diverse public services, so far no protection measures have been provided for the families, and they were attacked again in August.

On August 19th this year a settlement couple was tortured and held in captivity. This took place in front of the couple's three-year-old child. The attackers opened fire against other settlers who tried to help the victims. When Nova Guarita Military Police arrived at the site, they arrested the couple that was suffering violence, let their attackers go free and failed to confiscate their firearms.

1.2 Landless families terrorized by gunmen

*Hugo Chavez Encampment
Marabá-PA*

The Pau D'Arco massacre which took place on May 24th in the state of Pará is not the only case of violence in that state. Nine male and one female rural workers were brutally murdered by police at Fazenda Santa Lúcia. Others find themselves in situations of conflict, threatened, evicted and violated as a result of their fight for land and fulfilment of the agrarian reform.

The Hugo Chavez settlement, located at Fazenda Teresa in Marabá, the ownership of which is claimed by land-grabber Rafael Saldanha, is an example of this scenario of devastating violence, involving the appropriation of public lands and legitimization of land fraud by the State – the rancher managed to get the property tenure regularized by Iterpa (Pará State Institute of Land and Farming Planning).

Following the appropriation of the area by the land-grabber, conflicts have escalated there. The encampment is a constant victim of eviction attempts by gunmen. The settlers report that on July 16th 2017, armed men fired shots towards the settlement and set fire to the rural workers' shacks and plantations: *“on Sunday, it lasted all afternoon [they] fired at us and surrounded us as well. They positioned several armed men on the roads that provide access to the encampment”*.

*1.3 Threat of eviction puts the lives of rural workers at the Canaã occupation at risk
Rondônia, municipalities of
Ariquemes and Theobroma*

This is a case of land occupation for over 15 years in the region of the municipalities of Ariquemes and Theobroma, with more than 300 families and large-scale rural production. However a court eviction order has been issued and, even though this has led to agrarian conflict, the judge in charge of agrarian matters at the Rondônia Court of Justice has ruled that the National Force and the Military Police be notified to carry out the eviction. The apprehensive families have stated that they will resist to the end.

2. Indígenas

*2.1 Following an attack that left more than 20 wounded, Gamela indigenous people
endure gunfire, threats and continue to be at risk of being murdered
Maranhão, municipality of Viana.*

Even following denouncements of the brutal attack against the Akroá Gamela indigenous people at the Cajueiro Piraí village, located in the municipality of Viana/MA, the situation remains tense. In August alone firearms were discharged five times against the Cajueiro Piraí village where part of this ethnic group lives.

We are concerned about the high rates of violence against indigenous peoples and traditional communities in the state of Maranhão. There are currently some 376 peoples and/or communities in Maranhão that one way or another are experiencing situations of rural violence and conflicts. In 2016 alone, 196 incidents of violence against these groups in rural settings were reported. Maranhão was the state with the highest number of murdered indigenous people in 2016.

Maranhão is the home of the Gamela indigenous people and, since 2015, they have been retaking on their own their ancestral territory surrounding the municipalities of Viana, Matinha and Penalva, owing to the absence of measures by the Brazilian State to demarcate their lands.

The attack mentioned above occurred on April 30th 2017, when local ranchers forming a group they have named as “Movement for Peace”, which includes the participation of politicians, gave rise to a violent attack using firearms, other weapons, sticks and stones against Gamela indigenous people at Baías Village in the rural part of the municipality of Viana (MA). The aggressors had gathered to attack the indigenous people since the early afternoon, if not before, close to Baías Village, at a place called Santero, as per a call to rally made on social media networks and local radio programmes – including words of support uttered by Federal Congressman Aluísio Guimarães Mendes Filho (PTN/MA).

As a result of the violent action against them, 22 Gamela indigenous people were wounded – including two children and one pre-adolescent. Five adults were shot and three of them had to have their hands amputated after being attacked with sharp/blunt objects.

2.2 Guarani-Kaiowá indigenous peoples suffer attacks and threats

Mato Grosso do Sul

In 2016 the Indigenist Missionary Council (*Conselho Indigenista Missionário - CIMI*) denounced diverse paramilitary attacks organized by ranchers against the Guarani-Kaiowá indigenous people. One such attack resulted in the death of Clodiodi Aquileu and led to great commotion. Images filmed by the indigenous peoples showed several armed men setting fire to their dwellings and belongings in a brutal episode which, in addition to killing one indigenous person, left a further six wounded, including a child.

Between 2015 and 2016, a further 33 attacks on the Guarani-Kaiowá people were reported, with two of them being killed and dozens being shot.

The indigenous people make daily complaints to organizations and authorities about new attacks, threats and gunfire against their communities. The Guarani-Kaiowá ethnic group is comprised of approximately 60,000 indigenous people living in more than 50 communities.

We consider that the recent attacks on indigenous people at the Dourados reserve, in retaliation for the Guarani Kaiowá people having retaken their traditional territories, represent a foretold tragedy involving the risk of this group being massacred!

2.3 Chief Babau and leaders of the Tupinambá indigenous people continue to be victims of murder attempts and threats

Bahia. Ilhéus

The Tupinambá indigenous people suffer all kinds of prejudice and physical and cultural violence. Death threats are constant and their leaders are persecuted, violated and imprisoned. The most serious case is that of Chief Babau Tupinambá, who has been enduring murder attempts, death threats and persecution for years. Arrested because of his work in defence of the rights of the Tupinambá people, Babau suffered attempts on his life inside the prison system.

In 2016, some indigenous people asked the chief to witness sand mining carried out illegally by a mining company on indigenous territory. When he got there he was fired at by gunmen. In addition to being a victim of the attack, Babau was arrested by police agents who, according to the indigenous people, are involved in the conflict.

Despite diverse denouncements of the risk of the chief being murdered, both he and his family continue to be threatened. This year his brother was a victim of a murder attempt.

2.4 Massacred isolated indigenous peoples known as Flecheiros (Archers) warn that they are at risk of being exterminated

Amazonas

The lands of the Karipuna indigenous people, which have been demarcated, are being subject to incursions, deforestation and illegal division into plots of land. Recent news reports have scandalized the nation with initial information indicating that more than 20 Karipuna archers have been murdered in the Amazon. The Brazilian State has made no efforts to stop encroachment on their lands, has ceased monitoring isolated peoples in the region and has failed to allocate resources to enable the murders to be investigated.

The invisibility of the case, which was only revealed thanks to civil society efforts, as well as the State's omission in the face of the murders, indicate that the risk exists of these indigenous people being exterminated in order for their lands to be appropriated and to exploit the natural resources available there.

3. *Quilombola* Communities

3.1 Following the massacre that left 6 dead, threats and risks of new attacks continue

*Iúna quilombola community,
located in the municipality of
Lençóis/BA*

The situation of violence and threats that resulted in the massacre on August 6th this year, when six *quilombola* men were murdered, is still a cause of insecurity for this community. The facts relate to the *quilombola* territory landholding regularization process and to the interest of multinational companies in setting themselves up in the region in order to exploit natural resources. This is clearly an agrarian conflict.

Reports and testimonies indicate that the community had already been terrorized by previous incidents, such as the school being broken into and the murder of another *quilombola* man in June this year, in addition to death threat letters being pushed under people's doors.

The Federal Public Prosecutor's Office found the following during a visit to the community: "*a) the population is living in a state of continuous and severe fear, apprehension, anxiety and despair, in the face of the understandable fear of further criminal attacks that could result in harm to the physical integrity and/or lives of the quilombola people, thus being a serious case of public insecurity; b) there has been an abrupt exodus of its inhabitants. According to reports received, the community had 42 (forty-two) families; but after the lamentable episode only 12 (twelve) remained; c) the remaining dwellers no longer let their children attend the Irineu Dutra Municipal School, the only school in that community, for fear of new attacks; d) the school bus driver is so afraid that he refuses to go into the quilombola community;*"

3.2 Tension increases among the Marobá dos Teixeira Community following violence against quilombola people

*Municipality of Almenara,
Jequitinhonha Valley region in
Minas Gerais state*

Jurandir and Rosa are a couple and are members of the Marobá dos Teixeira *quilombola* community. They suffered a murder attempt on March 24th 2017, by armed men wearing hoods who broke into their home and beat up Jurandir (a human rights defender) until he passed out. Rosa was thrown to the ground, tied up and covered. She was forced to drink an unknown liquid and they tried to inject her arm with a substance that appeared to be gasoline. Following the attack, the couple filed a formal complaint with the police but the case is being investigated by the authorities of the municipality of Almenara as a mere case of grievous bodily harm, in an attempt to cover up the political motivation behind the attacks.

Since the incident, people belonging to the *quilombola* community are being blamed for repeated threats, as part of the resurgence of the conflict created by landowners in the region. This increases the risk of new attacks occurring, given that the process of granting title deeds to the land is currently being questioned at the anthropological report stage, this being one of the moments of greatest conflict between the parties involved.

3.3 The Rio dos Macacos Quilombola Community suffers beatings, torture and threats in the rural area between the municipalities of Salvador and Simões Filho, Bahia

The process of granting partial title deeds for the Rio dos Macacos *quilombola* land, located in a rural area between the municipalities of Salvador and Simões Filho in the state of Bahia, remains in limbo. In addition to encroaching on 2/3 of the identified traditional territory, after the community stopped the Navy from building a wall which would have prevented access to the Rio dos Macacos community, the Ministry of Defence ordered the interruption of the building of two independent access roads which had already been started to enable the community to access its territory without having to face the inconvenience of going through the Navy Base.

In the mean time, the community has been subject to beatings, torture and daily threats. Although the Navy hinders access to the territory by those who support the *quilombola* community, it apparently allows the free circulation of armed men from urban communities neighbouring the *quilombola* community, who threaten and instil fear and despair among its members.

Thus far two community members have been murdered and these crimes have not been duly investigated. The most recent episode, which highlights the risk of new murders taking place in the community, happened on 15/08/17, when a house was set on fire with a three-month-old baby inside, which fortunately was saved in time by its mother.

4. Fishermen

4.1 The family of Zé Menino, a fisherman murdered in July this year, is also at risk of being murdered

*Ilha da Croa Community,
Municipality of Araisos – MA –
Lower Parnaíba*

For over nine years the Ilha da Croa community has been subject to threats from landowners and gunmen who are disputing the territory in question. The land belongs to

the Federal Government. It is a fertile, productive and highly valued island located in the middle of the Parnaíba River, a region of fishermen and family farmers.

On July 5th 2017, the fishermen and family farmers were taken by surprise by heavily armed gunmen who fired at the fishermen. Fisherman José Menino was shot and cowardly murdered at the orders of landowners who are attempting to appropriate the Community's territories.

Ever since fisherman José Menino's death, his family has been being threatened by his attackers.

5. Violence in urban settings

5.1 Woman housing rights defender suffers death threats

*National Union for Peoples'
Housing, Manaus/AM*

Violence against movements fighting for housing is in keeping with the reality faced by other human rights defenders. The Committee has drawn attention to the difficulty in monitoring violence occurring in urban settings. The case reported is emblematic in demonstrating this reality.

On August 17th 2017, at around 10 o'clock in the morning, heavily armed men appeared at the Housing Estate, knocking on the doors of its residents, raising their shirts to show their firearms and saying that from then on they would be controlling Loteamento Orquídeas I, II and II, in the Santa Etelvina neighbourhood, and that they had come from another neighbouring city to carry out this mission.

The startled families sent for one of the social movement leaders, Cristiane Amaral Sales Teles. In front of several people she was threatened by a man who said he was acting on behalf of a person called Mano Xavier. Cristiane states that since then she has been threatened several times by telephone when these people say that: "they are going to tear me out of my house and tear me from inside myself". (*sic*)

Cristiane's case is similar to the serious situation face by diverse Homeless leaders, who are threatened with death and demand urgent protection to ensure they remain alive.

5.2 Defenders of the human rights of shanty town (favela) movement militants are made victims of security force actions involving kidnapping, attacks and intimidation

Rio de Janeiro/RJ

In Rio de Janeiro, shanty town (*favela*) militants and dwellers who fight against institutional violence have been systematically intimidated and seriously threatened by military and civil police officers. Reports include illegal telephone tapping, express kidnapping, breaking into households, sexual harassment, rape and even firearms being fired towards human rights defenders.

Between January and July 2017, 642 people were killed as a result of police operations in Rio de Janeiro. The majority of these deaths were summary executions of Black youths. This situation becomes even more serious in a context in which the Armed Forces, by means of the Decree to Ensure Law and Order, signed by Michel Temer,

have been authorized to be part of the public security forces in Rio de Janeiro. The Decree itself is blatantly unconstitutional and represents yet another large step in the militarization of the city, principally of poor neighbourhoods and impoverished city outskirts, based on the prevailing public security policy which is structurally built around racism and criminalization of poverty and human rights militants.

The imminence of the murder of human rights defenders in Rio de Janeiro's *favelas* is a fact that is clear to all sectors of society committed to human rights.

5.3 LGBTI rights defenders are persecuted and threatened by fundamentalists and neo-nazis in Curitiba/PR

Also standing out in the context of urban violence is the situation experienced by LGBTI human rights defenders.

Since 2005, LGBTI human rights defenders have been suffering threats and persecution in Curitiba/PR. These facts began following the delivery of a dossier to police authorities containing serious denouncements against skinheads, resulting in a group of neo-nazis being arrested. The following year, human rights defenders Igo Martini and Márcio Marins were physically attacked by three men, one of whom, after being arrested, confirmed the motive underlying the attack.

In 2012, the threats began again with promises of physical violence. The threat-makers created false profiles on social network media using the names of LGBTI leaders with the aim of offending public authorities, the mass media and, in particular politicians and government authorities. Defender Márcio, who was included in the Human Rights Defenders' Programme, received diverse telephone calls in which the persecutor gave details of his routine, the cloths he wore and the building where he lived. The door of the organization's offices was forced open.

There are constant threats on social networks against LGBTI leaders and events. The aggressors are supported by other groups such as Punks and Antifas. It is well known that Curitiba is home to neo-nazi groups. In 2015, for example, an event called *Dezembrada* was held in Curitiba with the aim of creating a Nationalist Front.

These facts demonstrate not only the continuing violence against these human rights defenders, but also a process involving the organization and strengthening of groups bent on committing crimes against LGBTI people.

5.4. Coordinator of the right to housing movement is a victim of murder attempt and his work becomes restricted owing to continuing threats

Zilda Xavier Settlement, in Planaltina/DF

On July 20th 2017, Luciano Moreira, Coordinator of the Movement of Workers for Rights (*Movimento das Trabalhadoras e Trabalhadores por Direitos – MTD*) suffered a homicide attempt.

The facts relate to the Zilda Xavier Settlement in Planaltina/DF. The threats are not limited to Luciano. The aggressors threaten and intimidate settlement dwellers and other coordinators there.

This fact must be rigorously investigated and Luciano's life, as well as the lives of the other human rights defenders at the Zilda Xavier settlement, must be protected.

Brasília/DF, September 15th 2017.

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