

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION

ITUC OnLine
115/000611

Rural Workers Pay with their Lives for Defending Forests

Brussels, 3 June 2011 (ITUC OnLine): The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) has expressed its deepest concern at the murder on 24 May of two environmentalists, José Cláudio Ribeiro Da Silva and Maria do Espírito Santo Silva, in an ambush seven kilometres from their home. There is, unfortunately, a long history of violence against rural workers in Brazil. The latest report of the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT) revealed, just over a month ago, that the year 2010 was marked by an increase in killings linked to land disputes, with 34 workers murdered.

Claudio and his wife had long been active in the defence of the forests, denouncing the actions of the loggers and big agribusiness in the region, which have already cleared almost 60% of the woodland. They had been receiving death threats in response to their fight against the logging companies in the region and in favour of the campesinos and rural workers. He himself had said that the next news of him would be his murder.

The two murdered workers were involved in a project promoting the sustainability of the Amazon, something which is crucial to the people of Brazil given the offensive being waged by logging companies unhappy with the measures aimed at preserving the forests.

Unfortunately, the state of Para is home to Brazil's key agribusiness and mining industries, which consolidate the country's trade balance, as well as being the state that has seen the highest rate of murders targeting rural workers over the last 13 years. This sad irony is a reflection of the excessive concentration of lands in the hands of a few and the state's decision to opt for an economic model that engenders exclusion and promotes incentives for big business at the expense of the family farming that feeds the people of Brazil.

In a letter <http://www.ituc-csi.org/asesinato-de-dos-trabajadores.html> to the president of Brazil, Dilma Rousseff, the ITUC called for every action necessary to be taken to investigate and clear up the facts surrounding these deplorable murders without delay, ensuring that all those responsible for these crimes, at every level, be brought to justice and sentenced in accordance with the law. "It is essential," said ITUC General Secretary Sharan Burrow, "that every necessary guarantee be provided for the implementation of sustainable development projects in order to build an inclusive system in the country, to prevent more murders such as these and bring an end to impunity."

The ITUC represents 175 million workers in 151 countries and territories and has 305 national affiliates. <http://www.ituc-csi.org> and <http://www.youtube.com/ITUCCSI>

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