

## INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION

### Brazil: Inter-American Court Decision a Victory in Fight Against Slavery

Brussels, 27 January 2017 (ITUC OnLine): The ITUC has welcomed a call from the ILO's Brazil office for land redistribution to combat forced labour in the country, following a landmark ruling by the Inter-American Court on Human Rights holding the government responsible for providing compensation to 125 slaves held at a ranch in Para State.

Sharan Burrow, ITUC General Secretary, said: "Powerful landholders are responsible for slavery in Brazil, and this judgement makes the authorities accountable for protecting workers from forced labour. With the government of Michel Temer rolling back labour laws and enforcement, even more people risk being trapped in forced labour. Meanwhile the perpetrators, including actual members of parliament, are escaping justice. Fair distribution of land and the full application of the rule of law are crucial to ending slavery in Brazil."

For decades, Brazilian workers, frequently indigenous or of African descent, have been victimised and kept in extreme poverty by landholders in the country's northeast. During the presidencies of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff, more than 44,000 people were freed from slave-like conditions; however, since Rousseff was deposed by Temer, political will to end forced labour has been absent.

In 2014, the agribusiness lobby succeeded in getting the Supreme Court to strike down the publication of a "dirty list" of companies profiting from slavery, and members of Brazil's Congress who were prominent in the deposing of Rousseff face credible allegations of responsibility for slavery themselves. Congress member Beto Mansur, a strong opponent of Rousseff, faces charges of keeping 46 people including several children in slave-like conditions in a case which is being reviewed by the Supreme Court on procedural grounds, while newly-appointed member of Congress Nelson Nahim was recently released from prison after serving just four months of a 12-year sentence for involvement in sex slavery involving victims as young as 8 years old.

Altogether, 30 out of Brazil's 81 senators and 130 of the lower house's 513 members are involved in investigations under the authority of the Supreme Court. Corruption investigations into politicians close to Michel Temer, and possibly into Temer himself, are expected to be scaled back after the death on 19 January of Supreme Court judge Teori Zavascki, who was overseeing the investigations. Zavascki died when the light aircraft in which he was travelling crashed.

"The work of institutions like the Inter-American Court of Human Rights is indispensable when the judicial and political systems are failing to uphold the rule of law, as is the case today in Brazil. The ITUC will continue its engagement with these bodies to promote and defend the rights of all workers," said Burrow.

The ruling in the case known as Fazenda Brasil Verde, published by the Court on 15 December, is the first to apply Article 6 of the American Convention of Human Rights prohibiting forced labour. The ITUC filed an amicus curiae brief with the Court in March 2016, and the Court adopted the arguments in the ITUC brief.

The ITUC represents 181 million workers in 163 countries and territories and has 340 national affiliates.

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For more information, please contact the ITUC Press Department on [+32 2 224 02 10](tel:+3222240210) or <mailto:press@ituc-csi.org>