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Brazil: Killing of human rights defender Rosenildo Pereira de Almeida amidst wave of repression against land rights defenders

On 7 July 2017, human rights defender **Rosenildo Pereira de Almeida** was killed by unidentified assailants in Rio Maria, Pará, Brazil. His killing comes roughly one month after the slaughter of ten other land rights defenders on 24 May 2017 by police.

[Rosenildo Pereira de Almeida](#) was a rural worker and land rights defender. He was one of the leaders of the **Santa Lúcia settlement**, a peaceful occupation to demand land rights and land reform, located at the border of Santa Lúcia farm in Pau D'Arco, Pará, Brazil. The human rights defender had previously received multiple threats as a result of his work. However the number of threats increased following the [killing of ten other defenders](#) who were also members of the settlement, in relation to land disputes, on 24 May 2017.

On 7 July 2017, Rosenildo Pereira de Almeida fled the Santa Lúcia settlement when he realized that he was being followed by unknown individuals. The human rights defender went into hiding in the Rio Maria village, over 60 kilometres away. That same evening, two unidentified assailants on a motorcycle shot at, and killed Rosenildo Pereira de Almeida while he was exiting a church in Rio Maria, Pará, Brazil.

Early in the morning of 24 May, 2017, a group of 25 landless workers decided to reoccupy the Santa Lúcia farm, located in the municipality of Pau D'Arco, in the south of Pará. A large number of other workers, were supposed to have joined the group, however, their hired vehicle broke down and failed to reach the site. The group of 25 who did arrive at the site camped temporarily in the woods, roughly 300 meters from the old farmhouse. Around 6:30am, that same morning, four police vehicles approached the site and the landless workers fled into a neighbouring forest. The police officers pursued them into the woods and located them. According to survivors, the police started to shoot towards the unarmed group, who were standing under a tent, taking shelter from the rain. Consequently, human rights defenders **Antônio Pereira Milhomem, Bruno Henrique Pereira Gomes, Hecules Santos de Oliveira, Jane Julia de Oliveira, Nelson Souza Milhomem, Ozeir Rodrigues da Silva, Regivaldo Pereira da Silva, Ronaldo Pereira de Souza, Weldson Pereira da Silva, and Weclebson Pereira Milhomem** were killed by the police.

Since the Pau D'Arco killings, Federal Police have been deployed to the area in order to investigate the case. According to the Prosecution Office, which is also investigating the case, the executions were premeditated. On 10 July 2017, 11 military police and two civil police officers were arrested at the request of the Prosecution, in order to safeguard the investigations and avoid interference and threats to the witnesses.

Human rights defenders and organisations in Brazil fear that the failure of the authorities to identify the perpetrators and bring them to justice could further endanger other settlements and occupations, especially those in Pará. According to the **Comissão Pastoral da Terra - CPT (Land Pastoral Commission)**, the Frei Henri settlement in Pará, also known as *Fazendinha* (small farm), which hosts more than 200 families on the margins of the PA 273 highway, is one of the most at risk. Since 2010,

the families have been struggling for the land to be included under the agrarian reform program. Despite repeated judicial victories, the authorities have constantly failed to enforce court decisions and to ensure the safety of the families, who are regularly threatened and attacked by farmers in the region.

Violence against human rights defenders in Brazil has escalated in tandem with the country's ongoing political and economic crisis. This situation is of particular concern as one of the first acts of the new interim government was to dismantle the Ministry of Women, Racial Equality and Human Rights. In 2017, after pressure from different sectors, the government created the Ministry of Human Rights, with a restricted mandate. The government has also dismantled the Ministry for Rural Development and the Agrarian Ombudsman. In addition, high profile politicians in the country have made several negative statements against civil society movements and organisations, suggesting that their actions are of a criminal nature. The Minister of Justice has declared in previous statements that the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais sem Terra – MST (Landless Worker's Movement)* used "[guerrilla tactics](#)" during its latest protests.

According to the CPT, in 2016 there were 1079 incidents related to land disputes in the country, a sharp increase compared to 771 cases in 2015. In Pará, between 1995 and 2010 there were 408 incidents with 61 people killed, representing around 35% of the cases nationwide. CPT also reported that in the micro-region encompassing Pau D'Arco and its surroundings, from 1990 to 2017 72 land rights defenders were killed in 39 incidents.

The Brazilian Human Rights Defenders Committee [reported](#) 66 killings of human rights defenders in 2016. Thirty-two of these murders occurred in the north of the country, the same region where Pará is located. Most were related to land conflicts. So far this year, the Committee has reported 43 killings of human rights defenders.

Front Line Defenders condemns the killing of human rights defender, Rosenildo Pereira de Almeida, and believes that the act was carried out solely due to his defence of land rights in Brazil. Front Line Defenders also expresses deep concern at the recurring reports of increasing numbers of killings of human rights defenders in the country.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Brazil to:

1. Publicly condemn the killing of Rosenildo Pereira de Almeida and ensure that the ongoing investigation into his killing be thorough and impartial, with a view to bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
2. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of the other members of Santa Lúcia settlement, as well as members of Fazendinha and other peaceful occupations in the country;
3. Ensure that the ongoing investigation into the killings of human rights defenders Antônio Pereira Milhomem, Bruno Henrique Pereira Gomes, Hecules Santos de Oliveira, Jane Julia de Oliveira, Nelson Souza Milhomem, Ozeir Rodrigues da Silva, Regivaldo Pereira da Silva, Ronaldo Pereira de Souza, Weldson Pereira da Silva, and Weclebson Pereira Milhomem is thorough and impartial with a view to bringing those responsible to justice in

accordance with international standards;

4. Take measures to ensure that government officials or other public figures refrain from making statements or declarations stigmatising the legitimate work of human rights defenders in the country;

5. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Brazil are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.