

## Brazil: Landowners Have License to Kill

In response to the upcoming trial of those charged with the murder of Chico Mendes, powerful landowners in the Brazilian state of Acre have increased their threats on the lives of rubber-tapper leaders and Mendes' family.

The jury trial in the Mendes assassination is scheduled to begin in June, and relatives of the accused murderers have been arriving in Xapuri, Mendes' hometown and the site of the crime, since March. Although many of them are reportedly armed, they have been allowed to roam the streets freely. Given that Mendes was assassinated after authorities failed to act against repeated threats on his life, recent incidents in Acre are of ominous portent:

In March, Ilzamar Mendes, Chico's widow, was physically attacked and beaten in the street by a relative of the accused killer. He was arrested but released the following day.

The chief of the Acre state police has admitted that Osmarino Amancio Rodrigues, president of the Rural Workers Union and secretary of the National Council of Rubber Tappers, is in grave danger, but says also that the police cannot protect him. Osmarino has gone into hiding and reportedly does not sleep in the same place two nights in a row. He has been singled out for assassination because he was instrumental in the recent creation of some 250,000 acres of extractive reserves in Acre.

The judge in the Mendes case, Adair Longine, has also been threatened, as have Mendes's brother, Jose Alves, Jorge Gomes Pinheiro, the new president of the Rural Workers Trade Union in Xapuri; Francisco de Assis, president of the Rubber Tappers' Cooperative; and Gumercindo Clovis Garcia Rodrigues, an agronomist and advisor to the National Council of Rubber Tappers.

According to the Council, farmworkers report that landowners have been meeting to plan the murders of peasant leaders, and have imported hired gunmen into Xapuri and the Acre town of Brasileia. Some of these mercenaries have already invaded union meetings.

The landowners' threats, which are meant to intimidate not only the Mendes family and the union officials but also witnesses and potential jurors, are not idle. In recent years hundreds of people, including peasants, trade unionists, lawyers, and priests, have been killed in Brazilian land disputes. The Acre police have shown no inclination to stop this violence. Indeed, Chico Mendes was killed in the middle

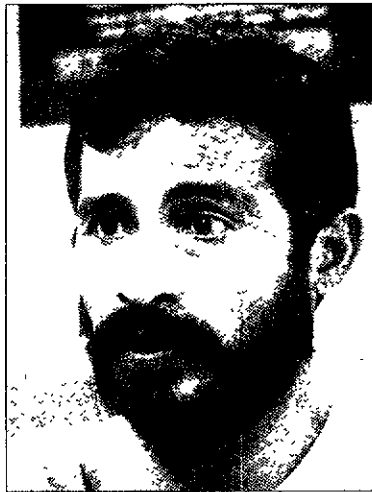
of a card game he was playing with a local policeman.

The threats are also a response to the recent creation of some 4 million acres of extractive reserves, which represents the largest victory to date for the rubber-tappers' movement and the fulfillment of Chico Mendes's lifelong dream. Cattle barons and other wealthy landowners are claiming that their private land was appropriated for reserves, and that their lack of actual title to the land is due to the slowness of the Brazilian bureaucracy.

Meanwhile, the rubber tappers do not yet have the economic wherewithal to exercise their rights to the reserves in a strong way.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

The assassination of Chico Mendes is a powerful reminder that death threats in Brazil must be taken seriously. We must remind the powers-that-be in Acre that the eyes of the world are upon them. And we must appeal to the national government to intervene. Please send letters along the following lines to:



*Osmarino Amancio Rodrigues*

Presidente Fernando Collor de Mello  
Palacio do Planalto  
Brasilia 70150  
Distrito Federal, Brasil

Flaviano B. de Melo, Governor of Acre  
Palacio Rio Branco  
Praca Presidente Eurico Dutra  
Rio Branco, 69900  
Acre, Brasil

Bernardo Cabral  
Ministerio da Justica  
Esplanada dos Ministerios, Bloco T  
Brasilia, 70055  
Distrito Federal, Brasil

Dear Sir,

I urge you investigate at once the death threats made against Ilzamar Mendes, Osmarino Amancio Rodrigues, and the other brave workers who are carrying on the work of Chico Mendes. Because the police of Xapuri and the state of Acre have shown little inclination to protect these people, I urge you also to provide federal protection for them. Brazil needs no more martyrs; nor does it need a reputation as a nation that looks kindly on death squads. Please act swiftly.

*Airmail postage is 45 cents per page (1/2 ounce)*

# Redwood Activists Bombed, But Campaign Continues

On May 24, after their reports of repeated death threats were ignored by local police, California rainforest activists Judi Bari and Darryl Cherney fell victim to a would-be assassin's pipe bomb planted in Bari's car. The explosion left Bari hospitalized in serious but stable condition; Cherney was released with minor injuries.

Judi and Darryl are key organizers of "Redwood Summer," a campaign to protect the last of the ancient redwoods remaining in the Pacific Northwest of the United States. If passed—and they already show substantial popular support—ballot initiatives scheduled for California's November elections would restrict logging of

redwood and other old-growth forests. Recently, however, the timber industry drastically increased its harvest. The "Redwood Summer" campaign seeks to slow this logging until the public has a chance to vote on it.

Campaign activities planned throughout the summer include such nonviolent direct actions as tree-sitting, logging-road blockades, banner hanging, and picketing, as well as hands-on tree planting and watershed restoration.

For information on the campaign, or to make a donation toward Judi Bari's medical expenses or the Redwood Summer Fund, write to: Box 210, Canyon, CA 94516.



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## Action Alert #49

### Fascinating Rainforest Fact

Since the Trans-Andean oil pipeline was opened in 1972, the three oil companies operating in the Ecuadorian Amazon—Texaco, PetroEcuador, and City—have spilled an estimated 17 million gallons of oil into the region's fragile web of rivers and lagoons, leading to massive increases in birth defects, cancer, malnutrition, and infant mortality among the indigenous people who live there. In response, the Ecuadorian government has levied exactly six fines for environmental damage. The largest of these fines totaled \$800.

Conoco, a subsidiary of the Dupont Corporation, plans to begin producing oil in the Ecuadorian Amazon in 1992.

## Save the Rainforests...

... It's more than just a phrase, it's the basis of everything we do at the Rainforest Action Network. Won't you please help by beginning or renewing your membership?

I want to  begin  renew my membership in the Rainforest Action Network with a tax-deductible donation of:

- \$15     \$25     \$50     \$75     \$100

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