

16 December 2019

Brazil: two killings in Anapu elevate concerns about lack of access to justice for land rights defenders in Pará

On 4 December 2019, land rights defender **Marcio Rodrigues dos Reis** was killed on a road close to Anapu. He was the main defence witness in a criminalisation case against human rights defender [Padre Amaro](#). Marcio is the 15th rural worker killed in the area since 2015. Shortly after, on 9 December 2019, state councillor Paulo Anacleto was also found dead. The councillor was actively engaged in the investigations into the killing of Marcio Rodrigues dos Reis.

Marcio Rodrigues dos Reis was a land rights defender who helped reorganise land occupied by landless workers, where he lived, after the camp was attacked and destroyed by armed hitmen. The lands are located at the Santa Maria farm, which is an area of public lands seized by a local agribusiness farmer. As a reprisal for his leadership, Marcio was imprisoned in 2017 for nine months and again in 2018 for five months, under trumped up accusations of carrying a gun without permission and of usurping land (known as ‘*esbulho*’) made by the agribusiness farmer himself.

In 2018, as a result of repeated threats against his life, the human rights defender was advised to leave Anapu. He spent more than one year hiding from militias, only returning to the city a few months ago to stay with his family and to work as a moto-taxi driver. On the evening of 4 December 2019, Marcio Rodrigues dos Reis was killed after being stabbed in the neck on a road close to Anapu, while driving his moto-taxi. The person who killed him has so far not been identified, however, local human rights defenders believe that it may have been a hitman hired by militias linked to illegal loggers and miners. Marcio was only 33 and a father of four daughters.

The same agribusiness farmer who had previously accused Marcio Rodrigues dos Santos, used his influence to convince local landowners to press charges against human rights defender Padre Amaro, falsely accusing the defender of organising and inciting occupations by landless workers in the area. Padre Amaro has acted in the defence of environmental and land rights in Anapu since 1989, assisting rural workers in agrarian conflicts. Padre Amaro is known as the successor of the missionary [Dorothy Stang](#), who was also killed in the same area in 2005, during the struggle for agrarian reform and dignified life for workers in the region. Padre Amaro was on pretrial detention between 4 March and 18 June 2018, and today faces alternative restrictions that include the prohibition to celebrate mass or to hold meetings with more than five people at once.

Marcio Rodrigues dos Reis was one of the workers pressured by the Chief of Police to back the false accusations against Padre Amaro. As he did not agree to do so, he became one of the few witnesses who could testify on the efforts to criminalise Padre Amaro in the ongoing judicial processes against him.

Marcio Rodrigues dos Reis would be the [15th worker killed in Anapu](#) allegedly by logging, mining and land grabbing militias since 2015. By the first months of 2019, only two of those cases had resulted in criminal proceedings, and another three resulted in an indictment of the suspects. The state of Pará is known for its [endemic impunity](#), in this case worsened by the apparent control that militias have over the police and judiciary. Under President Bolsonaro’s administration, land grabbings and killings of human rights defenders who denounce such activities have become morally sanctioned in favour of the expansion of agribusiness and economic gain.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned at the human rights violations, killings and impunity for crimes against human rights defenders in Brazil, and in the Anapu region in particular.

Front Line Defenders urges authorities in Brazil to:

1. Strongly condemn the killing of Marcio Rodrigues dos Reis, as it is believed to be directly motivated by his peaceful and legitimate work in defence of human rights;
2. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the killing of Marcio Rodrigues dos Reis, as well as into the threats against him, taking into account the retaliation for his human rights work as the main line of investigation, and with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
3. Take all necessary measures to ensure the physical and psychological integrity of the family members of Marcio Rodrigues dos Reis, especially his wife and four daughters, as well as all human rights defenders in Anapu, in consultation with them;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Brazil, in particular land and environmental rights defenders, are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.