

28 February 2020

Brazil: Killing of Paulo Silva Filho increases concerns for the situation of land right defenders in Pará

On 22 February 2020, Paulo Silva Filho, known as **Paulinho do PT**, was killed in Ourilândia do Norte, in the South of Pará, in the Brazilian Amazon region. This is the latest in a series of killings and attacks against families living on Agrarian Reform resettlement lands of the 1200 Farm (Occupation 1200), of which Paulinho do PT was a leader. The increase of violence against defenders in the region follows the issuing of state and federal government policies that legitimise land grabbing and violence in rural areas.

[Paulo Silva Filho](#) was a trade unionist, former city councillor in Ourilândia do Norte, and the leader of *Ocupação 1200* (Occupation 1200). He was a well known land rights defender who helped coordinate struggles for land rights in the South of Pará.

In the morning of 22 February 2020, unidentified individuals killed Paulo Silva Filho with a shot to his head, in front of the defender's shed in Ourilândia do Norte, in the South of Pará. There are strong indications that his killing might be a reprisal against his human rights work. Paulinho had previously denounced threats against him to the Prosecutor's office and Civil Police.

Attacks targeting human rights defenders in Pará, already at historically high levels, have further increased in recent times. [Alexandre Coelho Furtado Neto](#), also of *Ocupação 1200*, was shot on the chest on 19 October 2019, during an ambush.

Families living on lands that are part of the resettlement process of the Agrarian Reform program live under threat of constant attacks, killing, torture, captivity, arson, property attacks, poisoning by aerial spraying of pesticides and shooting of homes and vehicles. In this context, [attacks](#) against camp residents have become common. During the night of 14 April 2019, four armed men shot the houses of the 70 families who live in the public area of Farm 1200 to intimidate them into fleeing their homes. The land workers and human rights defenders of *Ocupação 1200* live and work to subsist there since 2006, in spite of a series of violent evictions.

Front Line Defenders has [denounced](#) the increase on threats and security issues against land rights defenders in the South and Southeast of Pará, recognizing that this violence is deeply connected to the concentration of land and resources by a few landowners who are gaining increased legitimacy by the current government in expand the reach of extractive industries and agribusiness.

Since the beginning of Jair Bolsonaro's presidency, Brazil has seen a number of government policies that intensifies conflict over land. The President has legitimised violence against defenders and rural workers by seeking to increase access to fire weapons by landowners, and dismantling structures and institutions that safeguard the right to access land. Moreover, at a state level, this situation was aggravated by the sanctioning of [Law 8.887/2019](#) by governor Helder Barbalho on 8 July 2019. This bill restricts access to land by social movements while favouring land grabbing and endangering environmental protection.

Front Line Defenders condemns the killing of land rights defender Paulo Silva Filho. It remains concerned at the impunity for crimes committed against human rights defenders in the South and Southeast of Pará, as well as the lack of an effective government structure that can respond to threats and attacks against human rights defenders. Front Line Defenders is further concerned at

the federal and state policies which contribute to an atmosphere of fear for land rights defenders, preventing them from doing their human rights work, and ultimately contributing to their killing.

Front Line Defenders urges authorities in Brazil to:

1. Strongly condemn the killing of **Paulo Silva Filho**, 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 **Paulo Silva Filho**, 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, including the investigation of those who ordered his killing;
3. Take all necessary measures to protect the physical and psychological integrity of the family members of **Paulo Silva Filho**, as well as all residents of Ocupação 1200, in consultation with them;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Brazil, especially in the state of Pará, are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.

Front Line Defenders respectfully reminds you that the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1998, recognises the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders, their right to freedom of association and to carry out their activities without fear of reprisals. We would particularly draw your attention to Article 12 (2): *“The State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration.”*

Please inform us of any actions that may be taken with regard to the above case.

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Anderson
Executive Director