



International Network for Economic, Social & Cultural Rights
Red Internacional para los Derechos Económicos, Sociales y Culturales
Réseau international pour les droits économiques, sociaux et culturels
الشبكة العالمية للحقوق الاقتصادية والاجتماعية و الثقافية

November 5, 2007

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*ESCR-Net is a project of
the Tides Center*

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Dear Sirs:

ESCR-Net is the largest global initiative of organizations and activists from around the world working to secure economic, social and environmental justice through human rights. We are writing to you now to express our grief and deep concern about recent reports of escalating tensions around the Syngenta farm in Santa Tereza do Oeste, Paraná. We are outraged to learn of the killing of Mr. Valmir Mota de Oliveira of the Landless Workers Movement (MST) and Via Campesina, as well as related instances of serious injuries on October 21, 2007. We urge you to take immediate steps to protect MST leaders Celso Barbosa and Célia Aparecida Lourenço who are currently in danger. We also call on you to hold the Swiss biotech company Syngenta accountable for whatever responsibility it had in these acts. We also call on you to calm tensions and prevent further incidents by disbanding privately armed groups in the region and immediately suspending operations of the NF Security company. We also trust and expect that your government will take the needed steps to guarantee the safety and human rights of members of these two groups and their partners in the future. Finally, ESCR-Net, as a network of 131 Members from 48 countries, stands with MST and Via Campesina in demanding that their human rights are respected and protected, particularly by ensuring that they are able to meaningfully participate in policy decisions directly affecting them.

As reported by Terra de Direitos, MST and Via Campesina, we understand that on October 21, 2007 Mr. Mota de Oliveira of the MST was shot dead at point-blank range two times in the chest by armed men while joining a protest against the operations of Syngenta Seeds, subsidiary of the Swiss biotech firm Syngenta AG and their illegal experimentation with generically-modified organisms (GMOs). According to reports, 150 farmers, including Mr. Mota de Oliveira, began a protest of the Syngenta farm at 6 a.m. Oct. 21, 2007. After ensuing tension between the protesters and four NF Security guards hired by Syngenta in the area, the

protesters peacefully disarmed the security guards, intending to hand the weapons over to police. The four NF Security employees then left the site, and the protesters proceeded to occupy the farm. Hours later at 1:30 p.m. of the day in question, a group of approximately 40 heavily armed gunmen—whom MST believes to have historic links with Syngenta—arrived at the entrance gate. The men were then reported to open fire on the encampment, killing Mr. Mota de Oliveira, severely injuring five other protesters, including Gentil Couto Viera, Jonas Gomes de Queiroz, Domingos Barretos, Izabel Nascimento de Souza, and Hudson Cardin. The attack reportedly occurred during lunch hour, under strong rain, which made it completely impossible for the workers to defend themselves. We also understand that the situation at the site remains extremely tense. The landless workers camped in the region—especially the MST leaders Celso Barbosa and Célia Aparecida Lourenço who were chased by the gunmen during the attack—remain in danger and are in need of immediate protection.

MST has further reported to us that this episode is by no means an isolated event, but only the latest in several such incidents of violence directed against the MST, Via Campesina and their partners in rural Brazil. We are concerned about such disproportionate violence being used to intimidate and repress activists expressing their legitimate right to protest against Syngenta's experimentation with GMOs. It is widely known that GMO substances often contaminate the agricultural stock of non-GMO farmers in the surrounding areas, thus posing a direct threat to their right to choose their agricultural methods and thus negatively affecting their livelihood rights.

We take very seriously the killing of Mr. Mota de Oliveira and the ongoing threats against MST and Via Campesina leaders. We therefore again call on you to take all possible steps to fulfill your fundamental duty to protect their lives and livelihoods and hold Syngenta accountable for actions within their sphere of influence leading to these aforementioned tragic events. To prevent further violence, we also call on you to immediately suspend activities of the NF Security company and disband privately armed groups in the region. Finally, we ask that you keep us informed on all measures taken.

Sincerely,

The International Network for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR-Net),

On behalf of ESCR-Net:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Julieta Rossi', with a large, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Julieta Rossi
Director