

Brazil : Murder of MST leader, Cicero Guedes dos Santos

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A leader of the Brazilian landless movement MST was shot dead by gunmen last Saturday in the north-east of the Rio de Janeiro State. Cícero Guedes dos Santos, father of five children, fought with landless peasant families to have an equitable redistribution of land and sustainable agricultural development. The 49-year old rural worker was also considered as a reference for his practice and knowledge of agroecology within the MST movement, as well as by students and professors with whom he collaborated at the University of Norte Fluminense, one of the main universities in Brazil.

War on Want is deeply saddened by the lost of an important and dedicated leader and we would like to send our condolences to his bereaved family.

Land reform is a critical issue in Brazil and is the centre of a bloody conflict between rich large landowners and poor landless peasant families who have mobilised as the MST, a long time partner of War on Want and one of the strongest social movements in Brazil.

The MST is calling for the perpetrators to be immediately brought to justice, prosecuted and sentenced.

At the heart of this tragedy lies a long-running legal battle to obtain access to land of a sugar plant, Usina Cambahyba, previously owned by the former deputy governor of the State of Rio and which had ceased to be used, some 280 km north-east of Rio de Janeiro. According to the Brazilian Constitution, unused lands are to be redistributed for the settlement of rural landless families as part of the agrarian reform. In light of this, Cícero led the occupation of the plant with other landless families, with the view of putting pressure on the government to proceed to the expropriation of the plant and redistribute the land to landless peasant families.

Last year, a judge ruled that the plant - comprising seven farms totalling about 3,500 hectares - was « unproductive » and should, therefore, be expropriated.

According to the MST, the National Institute for Colonisation and Agrarian Reform (INCRA), which

is charged with implementing agrarian reform to ensure equitable distribution of land and sustainable agricultural development, had committed to establish a settlement at the plant for the beneficiaries of the agrarian reform but until now, had not started the necessary procedure for land expropriation.

'The death of the comrade Cícero is the result of the violence used by large landowners, the impunity that prevails over any death against the landless and the slowness of the INCRA to settle the families and proceed to the Agrarian Reform', stated leaders of the MST.

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* <http://www.waronwant.org/news/265-latest-news/17797-murder-of-mst-leader-cicero-guedes>