



PRESS RELEASE

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Brazil: Police detain cameraman, confiscate equipment during land protest at frontier with Uruguay

ARTICLE 19 strongly condemns the abuses committed by military police officers against journalists covering a raid to remove peasants occupying a farm in the municipality of Rosário do Sul, in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, at the frontier with Uruguay.

On 3 March 2008, around 800 women occupied a farm owned by the Finnish-Swedish paper manufacturer, Stora Enso, in the South of Brazil. The protesters are members of Via Campesina, an international peasant movement that fights for family farm-based production and decentralised food production and supply chains.

According to press reports, Stora Enso has bought 45,000 hectares of land in the frontier between Brazil and Uruguay, where it plants eucalyptus trees. The protesters argue that Stora Enso should not have bought land in that area, since Brazil's legislation forbids foreign companies to exploit natural resources in the frontier zone. Following Via Campesina's occupation of the farm, the company obtained a judicial order to remove them from the area.

Journalists covering the police raid on 4 March told ARTICLE 19 that military police officers stopped and isolated them more than ten kilometres away from where the raid was taking place. *"It wasn't a matter of keeping the reporters safe. We were isolated and couldn't take pictures, film or hear what was happening in the farm"*, said Eduardo Seidl, a journalist from local newspaper Correio do Povo.

Mateus Flores, a reporter for Indymedia, told ARTICLE 19 that police threatened and detained him, and confiscated his equipment. He said that he had managed to film part of the operation, and registered violent actions and the harassment of two women by one of the regional commanders of the military police. After that, a colonel confiscated his camera and detained him for around thirty minutes with no justification, he told ARTICLE 19. According to Flores, police returned his camera but kept the DVD in which the images had been registered.

The two journalists told ARTICLE 19 that police also searched other reporters.

According to Via Campesina, around fifty women were hurt during the operation by rubber bullets, pieces of tear gas bombs, and aggressions by police officers. Two of the protesters were arrested. The Military Police in Rio Grande do Sul did not comment on the case.

NOTES TO EDITORS

- For more information, please contact Máira Magro at 55 (21) 8225-9817 or maira@article19.org
- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees freedom of expression.