

Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders and the Working Group on the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas

Ref.: AL BRA 2/2026

(Please use this reference in your reply)

2 February 2026

Excellency,

We have the honour to address you in our capacities as Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders and Working Group on the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 52/4 and 54/9.

In this connection, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information we have received concerning the **continuing threats against rural human rights defender Antônio Francisco de Sousa Araújo, from the Vergel community in the state of Maranhão.**

Mr. Antônio Francisco de Sousa Araújo is a human rights defender and leader of the Vergel community, located 51 kilometres from the town of Codó in the state of Maranhão. The community was founded by rural workers over 100 years ago, with its residents living from small-scale agricultural activities. For many years, Mr. Araújo has been prominent in denouncing illegal land grabbing and land occupations by farmers and loggers in the community, four members of which, all of whom were relatives of Mr. Araújo, have been murdered since 2007, including his brother, murdered in 2021. These killings, which have occurred in the context of land conflict in the community, remain in impunity.

Mr. Araújo was the subject of a previous communication, addressed to your Excellency's Government on 12 November 2024 (JAL BRA 1/2025). We appreciate the detailed response received on 14 January 2025, however, we renew our concern for the security of Mr. Araújo and his family in the light of the below-detailed information received.

According to the information received:

On 11 June 2025, Mr. Araújo was threatened by a man who entered his property and stated that he didn't fear being brought to justice.

On 15 September 2025, Mr. Araújo's land in the Vergel community was invaded by trespassers, who attempted to fence it off for the introduction of cattle.

Between 10 and 13 October 2025, individuals entered Mr. Araújo's property and fenced off his only source of water.

On 5 December 2025, the Agrarian Court of the District of São Luís, which had been considering the land dispute, suspended the proceedings so that the parties, Mr. Araújo, as the plaintiff, and the defendants, the alleged aggressors who have been invading his property and threatening him, could reach an agreement.

On 9 December 2025, armed men allegedly fired gunshots directly at Mr. Araújo's door.

On 7 January 2026, at around 10.45 a.m., armed men entered Mr. Araújo's property, destroying fences and rice plantations, and threatened to kill him, stating he would leave the place “dead or alive”. Mr. Araújo photographed the perpetrators and called an ally to alert them to what was happening. An armed men then spent the night circling his property.

All of these alleged attacks, threats and acts of intimidation have been denounced before various authorities in the state of Maranhão, including the State Secretariat for human Rights, the 2nd Public Prosecutor's Office for Agrarian Conflicts, the Land Solutions Commission of the Court of Justice and the Prosecutor General of Justice, as well as the National Human Rights Council.

Without wishing to prejudge the accuracy of the information received, we renew our severe concern for the physical integrity of Mr. Araújo and his family, and urge immediate action by your Excellency's Government to follow-up on the allegations and ensure their immediate and long-term safety.

In connection with the above alleged facts and concerns, please refer to the **Annex on Reference to international human rights law** attached to this letter which cites international human rights instruments and standards relevant to these allegations.

As it is our responsibility, under the mandates provided to us by the Human Rights Council, to seek to clarify all cases brought to our attention, we would be grateful for your observations on the following matters:

1. Please provide any additional information and/or comment(s) you may have on the above-mentioned allegations.
2. Please provide information on any additional steps taken since the response of your Excellency's Government to the previous communication concerning Mr. Araújo (JAL BRA 1/2025) to investigate and prevent the repetition of the attacks against him detailed therein.
3. Please provide information on any measure taken to guarantee Mr. Araújo's physical integrity and that of his family in light of the above-detailed alleged attacks, and to identify and sanction the perpetrators. If no such steps have been taken, please explain how this is compatible with Brazil's obligations under international human rights law (see Annex).
4. Please provide information on the judicial processes concerning the case, including on the suitability of mediation given the alleged acts of intimidation against Mr. Araújo and his family.

This communication and any response received from your Excellency's Government will be made public via the communications reporting [website](#) within 60 days. They will also subsequently be made available in the usual report to be presented to the Human Rights Council.

While awaiting a reply, we urge that all necessary interim measures be taken to halt the alleged violations and prevent their re-occurrence and in the event that the investigations support or suggest the allegations to be correct, to ensure the accountability of any person(s) responsible for the alleged violations.

We may publicly express our concerns in the near future as, in our view, the information upon which the press release will be based is sufficiently reliable to indicate a matter warranting immediate attention. We also believe that the wider public should be alerted to the potential implications of the above-mentioned allegations. The press release will indicate that we have been in contact with your Excellency's Government's to clarify the issue/s in question.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Mary Lawlor
Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders

Carlos Arturo Duarte Torres
Chair-Rapporteur of the Working Group on the rights of peasants and other people
working in rural areas

Annex

Reference to international human rights law

In connection with above alleged facts and concerns, we would like to draw the attention of your Excellency's Government to the following human rights norms and standards.

As in our previous communication concerning Mr. Araújo, we refer your Excellency's Government to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which Brazil acceded to on 24 January 1992, and in particular to articles 6 and 9, which guarantee the right to life and to security of person.

In connection to article 6 of the ICCPR, we again highlight the Human Rights Committee's general comment No. 36, concerning the right to life. In its General Comment, the Committee stated that the obligation of State parties to respect and ensure the right to life “extends to reasonably foreseeable threats and life-threatening situations” (CCPR/C/36 para 7). Concerning human rights defenders specifically, the Committee stated that the duty to protect the right to life requires State parties to take “special measures of protection towards persons in vulnerable situations whose lives have been placed at particular risk because of specific threats or pre-existing patterns of violence” and that such persons “include human rights defenders” (para 23). The Committee also stressed that State parties to the Covenant have an obligation, “where they know or should have known of potentially unlawful deprivations of life, to investigate and, where appropriate, prosecute the perpetrators of such incidents.” (para 27)

As previously highlighted, the right to security of person refers to protection against physical or psychological injury, or attacks on physical and moral integrity, and obliges State parties to take appropriate measures to protect individuals from foreseeable threats to their life or physical integrity from any State or non-State actor. As the Human Rights Committee has underlined, States parties should respond appropriately to patterns of violence against certain categories of victims, such as intimidation of human rights defenders, and should take appropriate measures to protect the victims of such violence (CCPR/GC/35 para. 9).

We also wish to again refer to the fundamental principles set forth in the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, also known as the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, in particular, article 1, which states that everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to promote and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels, and article 2, which provides that each State has a prime responsibility and duty to protect, promote and implement all human rights and fundamental freedoms, inter alia, by adopting such steps as may be necessary to create all conditions necessary in the social, economic, political and other fields, as well as the legal guarantees required to ensure that all persons under its jurisdiction, individually and in association with others, are able to enjoy all those rights and freedoms in practice.

We would further like to re-emphasise article 9 of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, which holds that in the exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the promotion and protection of human rights as referred to in the Declaration, everyone has the right to benefit from an effective remedy and to be protected in the event of the violation of those rights, as well as to article 12 of the Declaration, which states that the State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone exercising their rights under the Declaration against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action.

In addition, we also wish to again recall Human Rights Council resolution 31/32, which in its paragraph 1 reaffirms the urgent need to respect, protect, promote and facilitate the work of those defending economic, social and cultural rights as a vital factor contributing towards the realization of those rights, including as they relate to environmental and land issues as well as development. In the same vein, we again refer to general comment No. 26 of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, on the connections between land and the rights guaranteed in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (E/C.12/GC/26). In the General Comment, the Committee cites the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, reiterating the State duty to respect human rights defenders and their work, including where it connects with struggles over land.

Finally, we would like to underscore the relevance of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas, adopted by the Human Rights Council on 28 September 2018, including article 6 which affirms the right to life, physical and mental integrity, liberty and security of person; and article 12, which affirms that Peasants and other people working in rural areas have the right to effective and non-discriminatory access to justice, including access to fair procedures for the resolution of disputes and to effective remedies for all infringements of their human rights.