An independent United Nations human rights expert has called urged Brazil to strengthen efforts to close loopholes perpetuating the practice of slavery, including forced labour in the vast South American nation's rural areas. "Slavery is a crime that should not go unpunished," said Gulnara Shahinian, Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, including is causes and consequences, at the end of her visit to Brazil, Sunday 30 May 2010. The Government has taken commendable action to combat the scourge, including publishing a so-called 'Dirty List' of all farms and companies using slave labour, excluding them from accessing public funds, she said. But "some landowners, businesses and intermediaries, such as the gatos, have found a way to avoid criminal prosecution by taking advantage of legal loopholes that delay justice and foster impunity," the expert said.

Civil penalties have been successfully applied to some landowners and companies but criminal penalties have not been enforced, with jurisdictional conflicts and delays in the judiciary system resulting in the lapsing of the statute of limitations, she pointed out. Although forced labour is considered a serious crime, first-time offenders might only face house arrest or community service. Brazil could shortly become the world's fifth largest economy, but the Special Rapporteur cautioned that this ascendancy should not come at the expense of people's rights.

Forced labour in rural areas, which she said is a "slavery-like practice," is most wide-spread in the cattle ranching and sugar cane industries, and the victims are mostly men and boys over the age of 15. In Brazil's urban areas, forced labour takes place largely in the garment industry.

"In all these situations the victims of forced labour work long hours, with little or no pay," Ms. Shahinian said. "They are threatened with, or subjected to physical, psychological and sometimes sexual violence." During her visit, she held talks with Government authorities, international organizations, the private sector and non-governmental organizations, and visited communities in São Paulo, Cuiabá, Imperatriz, Açailândia and Brasilia. In rural areas, she met with people subjected to forced labour and slavery-like practices in the cattle ranching and sugar cane industries, and she also spoke with garment workers. The expert called for the adoption of schemes that ensure that the people most vulnerable to performing forced labour can enjoy basic rights, such as the rights to food, water and education to allow for their rehabilitation and reintegration into economic life and social protection networks. Education should also include vocational training and literacy programmes, which should be complemented by Government action to safeguard the right for indigenous groups and others "to work without having to succumb to forced labour," she stressed.

"The strongest message that the Brazilian Government can send to Brazilians to show that the crime of slavery will not go unpunished is to pass the constitutional amendment" which would allow for the expropriation of land where forced labour is used," the Special Rapporteur emphasized. "This expropriation would occur without compensation and the land would be re-distributed, with priority being given to those workers previously held in conditions analogous to slavery." Passing this amendment, she said, "will show that Brazil is indeed strongly committed to fighting slavery."

The Socio-Religious Origins of Brazil’s Landless Rural Workers Movement

LOWY MICHEAL⁴ wrote: “Of all the structures tied to the Church, few have incarnated this “preferential option for the poor” in as radical and consistent a fashion as the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT). A vast network composed both of members of the clergy—especially from the religious orders, but also priests and even some bishops—and also of lay people of various types—theologians, experts, Bible scholars, sociologists and above all, lay workers, often coming from

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⁴ Michael Lowy is the author of On Changing the World (Boston: Humanities Press, 1992). He is Research Director in Sociology at the CNRS (National Center for Scientific Research) and is Guest Lecturer at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, both in Paris.
the rural milieu—the CPT, founded in 1975, has been a formidable school for peasant leaders. At first established in the North Region—Amazonia—and the Northeast Region, it has spread out little by little to the whole of the country; thanks to its direct connection to the CNBB (National Conference of Brazilian Bishops). The Commission enjoys considerable autonomy in relation to the local parish structures, and is not dependent on the good will of the bishops of each region. Many lay workers, but also some members of the clergy—Father Josimo Tavares, the organizer in the so-called Parrot's Beak region (in Para state), is just the best-known example—have paid with their lives for the CPT's active and intransigent commitment to the side of the rural workers struggling for their rights. The millenarianism of the CPT—but also of the CEBs and in a general way of liberation Christianity—is expressed in the socio-religious utopia of the “Kingdom of God,” not as a transcendent quality projected into another world, but as a new society here on earth, one based on love, justice, and freedom. However, contrary to traditional millenarian beliefs, this “Kingdom” is not conceived as imminent but as the result of a long march—caminhada is the Brazilian word—toward the Promised Land, following the biblical model of the Exodus. The present social struggles are theologically interpreted as stages that prefigure and herald the “Kingdom.” A reading of the Bible that is innovative and charged with a social sense of history is one of the decisive formative elements in this sui generis millenarian faith and its transmission into working-class strata. One of the central characteristics of the CPT’s socio-religious culture, which is found in its entirety in the MST, is the critique of the drastic social consequences of the introduction of capitalism in the countryside—unemployment, eviction of peasants, pauperization, and the exodus from the countryside. This is accompanied by the denunciation of the authoritarian “modernization” policies of the military dictators and their “Pharaonic” projects and protests against the neoliberal orientation of the civilian governments that have replaced the military regime beginning in 1985. Starting from liberation Christianity’s fundamental postulate— that the poor are the subjects of their own history—the CPT has given itself the objective of assisting the self-organization of the rural workers. Respecting the autonomy of the social movements and their secular nature, the CPT rejects the traditional clerical conception of the “Christian” union—or party. It is a question simply of aiding, encouraging, supporting, and protecting against police repression, or repression by the big landowners’ agents-agricultural workers’ efforts to organize themselves.

The CPT was created in 1975, during Brazil’s military dictatorship, at a meeting of the Pastoral da Amazonia in Goiania, capital of the central state of Goiás, called by the Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil CNBB: From the beginning, the CPT was known for defending rural workers who were struggling for agrarian reform and protecting pastoral agents who began to be threatened by large landowners precisely because of their support for equitable land distribution, an important focus during the military regime.

The CPT’s actions were, therefore, the expression of Brazilian Catholic Church sectors committed to agrarian reform and social justice in the countryside. However, the CPT has been ecumenical since its inception because of the presence of members of other Christian churches such as the Igreja Evangélica Luterana no Brasil. The CPT’s national congresses have always provided an important opportunity for reflecting on the organization’s actions and, above all, on the progress of social movements’ struggles for agrarian reform and justice for rural workers.

Pastoral Land Commission (CPT), realized its 3rd National Congress, at the Marist School in San Jose, Montes Claros MG (on May 17 to 24). The theme for this year’s event has: “Biomes, Territories, and Diversity of Farmers”, and the slogan "Memory and Resistance in Defense of Life." About 800 people, including officials of the CPT, rural workers, representatives of social movements, and other guests attended the Congress. According to the organizers of the event, the third Congress "is a special time to reflect on the direction that employees will propose for the CPT’s actions in the coming years." It will also be a moment to listen to the cry of the peoples of the earth, and to recall their struggles, bloodshed, and victories at the cost of great effort.

I interviewed the French Dominican Brother Xavier Plassat; he started working on behalf of rural peasants in northern Brazil and ended up leading a national campaign against modern-day slavery.

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2 Monthly Review, June, 2001
The Department of USA State's 2010 Trafficking in Persons Report names him as one of nine "TIP Heroes" for his work in Brazil.

What does slavery look like?

Modern-day slavery in Brazil is a form of exploitation in which rural workers, generally illiterate, landless, and without knowledge of their rights, are lured by middlemen or employers with false promises of good jobs and money. These workers are taken to work in remote areas in Northeastern Brazil and are forced to work in forestry, charcoal production, the ranching industry, and on sugar, cotton and soybean plantations. In many cases these workers have no access to clean drinking water, sufficient food, and are not provided with a place to sleep. Nevertheless, they are charged exorbitant prices for their lodging and transportation and are living in a constant deficit cycle in which they cannot work off the debt they've incurred.

How does the CPT work to help these workers?

We work on two fronts, with the workers themselves and with the Brazilian authorities. The victims are obviously our priority. We welcome these workers. We listen to their stories. We encourage workers to denounce their treatment with the authorities, so that there is an investigation that will, hopefully, lead to the release of those who remain on the farm.

We also pressure authorities to investigate claims, take action against employers, and adopt measures to help avoid people from being re-enslaved. One of the problems is that this form of enslavement is cyclical. It's made up of three components: poverty, greed, and impunity. Whenever you leave one of these components operating you allow the cycle to work once more.

Releasing slaves is not enough, then?

Releasing slaves is not eradicating slavery. To eradicate slavery you have to address the question of impunity, poverty, and greed. The current model of farming in Brazil often feeds off the fact that employers go unpunished so they continue to mistreat workers, the poverty of the workers and lack of access to their own land makes it so they often feel they have no choice but to work in these conditions, and the greed of employers doesn’t motivate them to improve working conditions, all these situations are fueling the cycle of enslavement.

What is being done to address the issue of employer abuse?

The Brazilian government has created a “dirty list,” that publically names those who have been found guilty of allowing slavery on their properties. These people are prohibited from accessing public funds, and several banks are cutting credit to them.

What advances have been made in the fight against slave labor?

We have had some advances in the last 10-15 years. The first step was that the authorities acknowledged that there was a problem and created a special task force to investigate claims of slavery. Since the task force’s inception in 1995, around 38,000 workers have been released, 90 percent of them in the last 7 years.

What does this TIP Hero award mean to you and the fight against slave labor in Brazil?

It’s an honor that Brazil is being held up as something of a model of not only acknowledging the problem, but taking action against it. Even so, with all this concerted effort, why hasn’t Brazil been able to eradicate slavery? We haven’t been able to do so because our national efforts to combat slavery are insufficient. This award helps to shine a light on the job that we’re doing—that the CTP is taking the necessary steps to eradicate slavery, but it is not saying that Brazil has won the war against slavery. We are on the right track, but we are conscious of the fact that there are other demands that must be
addressed that have not been addressed. CTP is here to insist that actions be taken until no one is forced to live and work in slave like conditions.

**New Bishop of CPT: Fidei donum priest, since 1976 in Brazil**

On January 9, over 10,000 faithful attended the solemn and festive celebration of the episcopal ordination of the new Bishop of Afogados da Ingazeira (Brazil), Bishop Egidio Bisol, 62, of the clergy of the Diocese of Vicenza (Italy), Fidei donum priest in Brazil since 1976. The diocese is located in northeastern Brazil, a land plagued by drought, characterized by conflicts over land and by strong social inequalities. During the ordination, the Archbishop of Recife, His Excellency Fernando Saburindo, stressed that the new bishop "is now faced with various challenges, even if it is already very committed to the social cause."

The ceremony was presided by the Archbishop of Vitoria da Conquista and predecessor of Bishop Bisol, Archbishop Luis Gonzaga Silva Pepeu. The co-consecrating Bishops were Paloshi Roche, Bishop of Roraima, the Archbishop of Vicenza, Archbishop Cesare Nosiglia, who had come accompanied by a delegation of priests and lay people of Vicenza, who stressed that "the appointment of Bishop Bisol recognizes and rewards the hard work of the Diocese of Vicenza in the mission field through the Fidei Donum priests, who for several decades, working in several churches outside Europe, characterizing the life of the clergy and are a valuable presence of apostolic service in Brazil, Ecuador, Cameroon, Thailand, and Colombia."

The episcopal ordination of Bishop Egidio Bisol is "also the richness of the Church through this exchange Fidei Donum priests, who have even reached martyrdom, as is seen in the recent example of Fr. Ruggero Ruvoletto of the Diocese of Padua, who was killed on the outskirts of Manaus," added Cristiano Morsolin, of the SELVAS Observatory on Latin America, working in Latin America since 2001.

Since 1976, Fr. Bisol has been in Brazil serving as a Fidei donum missionary, first in the Diocese of Afogados da Ingazeira and, recently, in that of Roraima in the Amazon. Since his arrival, he has closely followed the paths of formation of the laity and ecclesial base communities, engaging in particular in youth ministry. He has always maintained links with Italy, supporting the "Camp-Schools in Brazil," organized by the Diocesan Mission Center in Vicenza, and following international cooperation projects and those supporting the local Pastoral Land Commission. He has also assumed many responsibilities in the Diocese of Afogados, including that of Vicar General. In 2008, he was sent to the service of the Diocese of Roraima, as a member of the team responsible for the pastoral care of the Mission Santa Rosa de Lima, a suburb of Boa Vista. The new Bishop said after the ordination: "I chose as a motto a verse from the Gospel of Luke, 'the great of this world dominate the world, but I am among you as one who serves'. As one who serves, "sicut in ministrat" in Latin. This will be the motto of my episcopal service."

**Church’s Land Commission Demonstrates Increase in Violence Against Rural Workers**

The violence against rural workers is increasing in a disproportionate manner when compared to the increase of organised protests and marches by rural workers’ movements. The recrudescence of repression is highlighted in the publication *Conflitos no Campo Brasil 2009* (2009 Conflicts in the Brazilian Rural Areas) released on April 15, 2010, by the CPT (Land Commission of the Catholic Church). In the introduction by the National Secretary of the CPT, Antônio Canuto, it states that on the whole, the year 2009 “was a very difficult year,” with a marked increase in the outlawing [of rural movements]. According to the report, a pact between large rural landholders, the Congress, the Judicial Powers and the corporate press caused the noose to tighten on rural organisations, “undermining the support from society that has taken years of struggle to build up”.

According to the publication, the year 2009 saw a 1.2% increase in conflicts in rural areas over the year 2008. Last year, there were 1184 conflicts, compared to 1170 the year before. However the increase in the number of arrests went up 22%, from 168 in 2008 to 205 in 2009. And the increase in the number of judicial evictions was even greater at 36.5%: 9077 families to 12,388. Fortunately, assassinations were down from 27 to 24.
In the report there are cases that, irrespective of the numbers, “pass the limits of good sense”. For example, on April 26, 2009, 18 rural workers were arrested after protesting in a construction area of the Tucuruí Dam project. “Before being sent to the [capital] Belém, they were obliged to march in parade handcuffed through the whole city of Tucuruí, on exhibition, as if they were some sort of trophy of the military police,” commented Canuto.

**Attack by hooded men**

Another episode recorded in the report happened on May 1st [National Workers’ Day]: “An encampment site of the rural workers by the roadside of BR230, municipality of Pocinhos, Paraíba, was attacked by a group of hooded men, who fired shots against the families, and detained and tortured seven of the workers. They threw gasoline on them and threatened to burn them alive.” The aggressors fled after the police arrived, and the officers arrested the workers, and accused them of being responsible for the violence. According to the CPT, in both cases, the activists were jailed for more than a month before being released. Canuto observes that “in spite of everything, the social movements resist and fight for their space.” Even so, the growth in evictions (36.5%) and arrests (22%) is disproportionate in relation to the increase of occupations, which rose by 15% (252 in 2008 and 290 in 2009).

Besides this, in the other tables presented by the CPT, the number of actions of popular organizations fell. Fewer encampments were set up (from 40 to 36); there were fewer strikes and other protests connected to the struggle for workers’ rights (identified in the report as acts of resistance) (from 23 to 22); and there were fewer protests (from 676 to 589). The CPT identified the rulings of Gilmar Mendes, who heads the Federal Supreme Court, as the key which precipitated this process of increased repression. In the introduction to the report, Canuto states that on February 25, 2009, this current leader of the Judicial Powers (who leaves his post this month) went to the press to accuse “the movements of practicing illegal acts,” and criticized the federal government for “committing illicit acts of funneling public resources to those who, according to him, practice such acts.”

**Outlawing of social movements**

This climate of outlawing [social movements] became nationally dispersed in August with a reaction to an agreement between Via Campesina and the federal government to update the indices of productivity of land. “The criticism of the announced measure was accompanied by generalized attacks on the rural workers’ movements. Senator Kátia Abreu and Deputy Ronaldo Caiado, aligned in their criticisms, collected signatures for the creation of a Mixed Parliamentary Commission of Enquiry (CPMI) to investigate the destination of public resources to movements which act ‘against the law,’ as affirmed by the president of the Supreme Court,” wrote Canuto. The lobbies of the large rural landholders would have not succeeded in gathering enough signatures, had it not been for television images and reports, released on 5 October, which showed rural workers occupying a large farm illegally obtained by Cutrale, a large orange juice company. Finally, the report cites the formation of the Observatório das Inseguranças Jurídicas no Campo in February of this year. The initiative, from an alliance between large landowners and sectors of the Judiciary Powers, proposes to accompany actions which represent threats to the right of property, and to map “effective or imminent invasions of rural property.” According to the CPT report, the figure who is most prominent in this initiative was Gilmar Mendes, wrote “Brasil de Fato”.

**NEW PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS AND LAND REFORM**

In the country with perhaps the most unequal land distribution in the world, electing a pro-worker, pro-poor president marked a potential turning point when Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of the Workers Party won the presidency in 2002. But as Lula finishes up his second term (new presidential elections take place in October 2010), the Landless Workers' Movement MST’s and CPT assessment is grim. Land redistribution has stagnated, the government continues to bet on agribusiness as a development strategy and, most threateningly, powerful regional politicians are moving to criminalize the land seizure movement as "terrorist."³
"There is a change in the form of persecution," explained Maria Luisa Mendoza of Social Network for Justice and Human Rights (Rede Social), a human rights group that works closely with the MST. "Instead of killing activists, now they (state governments, which are chiefly responsible for law enforcement) arrest them. It’s better than killing them, but it doesn’t mean that the persecution has ended."

Lula’s government has also undertaken other progressive reforms, most notably the "Bolsa Família" (literally, family pocketbook) program that provides a basic income to the very poorest families. Though the aid does not confront the structural causes of poverty, it provides a crucial margin of survival and offers incentives for families to keep their children in school. Responding to criticism that Bolsa Família is a form of clientelism, the MST’s Rodrigues reasoned, "Yes, it’s clientelism. But given the extreme poverty in Brazil and the large numbers of people going hungry, these clientelist policies are necessary." He quickly added, "Necessary, but insufficient." The MST’s support (if grudging) is notable, because arguably the stipend reduces the incentive for families to take the risk of occupying land, potentially weakening the landless movement’s social base.

The MST’s biggest disappointment with Lula has been the former militant union leader’s enthusiastic embrace of agribusiness. The Brazilian economy rode high on the commodities boom of the 2000s, with huge expansions in soy, sugar cane, and eucalyptus plantations (the last primarily for paper production). Factory farming is expanding at a ferocious clip: according to MST leader Rodriguez, in three years in the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul alone, 300,000 new hectares of eucalyptus have been planted (a hectare is about 2.5 acres), dwarfing the 100,000 hectares the MST has put into cultivation in its entire 25 years of activity.

The environmental consequences have been predictably negative: monocropping, heavy use of chemical inputs and genetically modified strains, voracious water consumption (eucalyptus plantations have been dubbed "green deserts"), toxic by-products, and expansion into wetlands in the Amazon and other areas - especially in the case of sugar cane. Ironically, much of the sugar cane goes into Brazil’s massive "eco-friendly" ethanol fuel industry. Unlike the U.S.’s corn-based ethanol industry, Brazil’s cane-based system makes money without subsidies - but this accounting overlooks the unmeasured costs of environmental devastation and labor exploitation (or the fossil fuel used in its production and, in the case of export, transportation). The Brazilian government was to announce regional zoning barring sugar cane from Amazônia in February 2009, but that declaration has not yet materialized and human rights advocate Mendonça states flatly, "I don’t think it’s going to happen." But if the environmental consequences of agribusiness have been dire, the social consequences are at least as ominous. Far from displacing Brazil’s traditional landed oligarchy, the agribusiness boom has forged a new alliance between giant landowners, chemical-agricultural transnationals such as Monsanto and Syngenta, and the national government.

Leonardo Boff, the writer and liberation theologian, spoke on Thursday June 10, 2010 in favor of Marina Silva, the noted Brazilian environmentalist and former senator and minister of the environment, at the convention in Brasilia that formalized her candidacy for the Green Party. "I have never participated in any event to launch a candidacy, but the invitation from Marina changed my mind. She makes policy with the methods of Gandhi, with respect for living things," said the theologian. Boff also said that involvement in environmental issues in the elections will be benefitted by the candidate’s presence. "After her, policy will be different. Marina has introduced two fundamental principles: first sustainability, which opposes the devastation of nature, and care, which opposes the domination that marks our culture," he said. Boff said that "the earth, humankind and Brazil need Marina and Guilherme Leal to save this heritage that the universe has given us" and he highlighted the activities of Leal with regard to Natura Cosmeticos, a firm in which Leal has a major stake. "Guilherme Leal is a worthy candidate for vice president because he has deployed ecological methods in the

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4 20 anos da Convenção dos Direitos da Criança: A infancia ainda em risco, Comissao de Direitos Humanos – Senado Federal de Brasilia, materia de Cristiano Morsolin
production process at Natura," he said. The theologian said that Brazil needs a woman in government. Citing a document of the United Nations, Boff said that "we must give more decision-making and power to women if we want to save the planet."

Brazil's Green Party presidential candidate Marina Silva proposed on Monday to cut taxes and social security benefits, giving a market-friendly slant to her platform of clean government and environment. Silva, who stepped down as President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva's environment minister in May 2008, also urged a reform of the country's costly pension system, echoing pledges by ruling party candidate Dilma Rousseff and the leading opposition contender Jose Serra.

* Cristiano Morsolin, of the SELVAS Observatory on Latin America, working in Latin America since 2001. He collaborates with CETRI.

BRAZIL

CHURCH AND RURAL WORKERS BATTLE

FOR LAND REFORM

Aún soy esclavo

Niños y niñas de la Región Norte de Brasil, han participado de un concurso de dibujos contra el Trabajo Esclavo en Brasil en ocasión del Fórum Social Mundial 2010.
PHOTO: Br. Xavier Plassat, of the Pastoral Land Commission of Episcopal Conference of Brazil