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Failure To Implement Agrarian Reform Seen As Major Threat To Democratization Process In Brazil

by John Neagle
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At an Oct. 7 press conference in Sao Paulo, Brazil, Argentine human rights advocate and 1980 Nobel Prize winner Adolfo Perez told reporters that the failure of an agrarian reform plan in Brazil would inevitably "weaken the consolidation of the democratic process." Perez initiated a three-day visit in Brazil on Oct. 6, at the invitation of Sao Paulo's Catholic University. The Argentine human rights leader declared he was "alarmed" with the level of violence in the Brazilian countryside, and defended "energetic measures" by the government to push the reform forward despite considerable resistance on the part of large landowners ("latifundistas"). According to Brasilia's reform plan, 4.6 million ha. are scheduled for distribution to thousands of rural families this year. To the present, however, official statistics show that less than 25% of the land area indicated has been distributed. Between January and July, the Catholic Church estimates that at least 130 persons have died in land-related conflicts, the majority peasant farmers. The Church holds rural landowners responsible for the violence. According to a report by UPI, Perez said the situation will be further aggravated if the government refrains from "energetic measures to solve the problem and if society does not find mechanisms to demand the viability of agrarian reform." Perez's position on the reform question is similar to that advocated by the Brazilian Catholic Church hierarchy. Statistics developed by official and non-official agencies indicate that approximately 10 million landless families reside in the Brazilian countryside.

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