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Brazilian Agrarian Reform Program Far Behind Schedule On First Anniversary

by John Neagle
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On Oct. 10 the first anniversary of Brazil's agrarian reform legislation Agrarian Reform Minister Dante de Oliveira told reporters that the plan was far behind schedule. First year plan goals included the distribution of 1,054,000 ha. to 150,000 rural families. As of Oct. 10, however, only 10,632 families had received 332,000 ha. Oliveira said the delay was largely a result of lengthy legal proceedings arising from actions by large landowners. He added he favors the creation of a special court system, similar to labor tribunals, to speed up the reform effort. An estimated 30,000 families are currently residing in 60 roadside camps on the perimeter of landholdings scheduled for distribution. Landowners opposed to the reform are represented by the Rural Democratic Union. Numerous acts of violence against peasants by hired gunmen have been traced to the Union. While estimates of violent incidents related to land conflicts vary widely, at least 50 killings, the burning of 172 rural workers' homes, and the eviction of 1,626 landless peasant families, have occurred in the past year. Camps set up by landless rural workers near the Annoni Ranch in Rio Grande do Sul have been surrounded by military police for the past two weeks. With the support of the Catholic Church, 250 camp residents broke the blockade on Oct. 9, and commenced an eight-day march to the Cruz Alta municipal seat. Rural workers in the camp have announced a public meeting will take place within the blockade in the near future. An estimated 30,000 persons are expected to attend, including representatives of several civil and religious organizations. Catholic clergymen Frei Betto and Leonardo Boff, known for their works on liberation theology, are expected to attend.

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