

## Farmers in rural Brazil fight for land

**Land disputes in rural Brazil between wealthy landowners, powerful corporations and small farmers result in dozens of people dying every year.**

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The attention of the world will be focused on the drama unfolding in Brazil's billion-dollar stadiums this summer but the struggles of the landless poor - dozens of whom die in land disputes annually in the countries rural interior - remains untold.

Brazil has one of the world's most unequal distributions of land, 3.5 percent of landowners hold 56 percent of arable land while the poorest own barely one percent, according to an Inter Press Service report.

The Landless Workers Movement (MST) have been campaigning to put land back into the hands of small farmers since 1984.

At the age of 22, Itelvina Masioli's family were itinerant peasants who used to move from farm to farm tiling crops and milling other people's grains.

Today, Masioli is the national director of the MST and is working to re-distribute Brazil's intense concentration of land in the hands of wealthy landowners, or latifundios, and powerful corporations to peasants.

"All our camps have suffered violence from latifundios, from police, from paramilitaries, from hired guns who attack the camps on the behalf of agribusiness and latifundios," said Masioli. "They kill us, they beat us – it happens all the time."

The campaigners camp on land – usually for years – until the government agrees to "disappropriate" it, and settle families there legally, according to Masioli.

"For a peasant family, the land contains everything within it. It is work; it is food, water and production. It is your life," she said. "A peasant with no land has no life."

Brazil's biggest difficulty is the lack of public policies to develop settlements, said Kelly Mafort, co-National Director at MST, which has 90,000 families living in makeshift camps.

"The government has prioritized the economy and agribusinesses, so making settlements is not a priority for them," Masioli said.

Carlos Finhler, whose deeply-lined mahogany face at 55, looks rather older, lived in an MST camp in Rio Grande do Sul, the southernmost state in Brazil, for 14 years before the government gave the land to the families.

"When they came to give us the news they offered money and relocation to people who had documents to their land," Finhler said. "But most people didn't, and with no documents, you were offered only a very, very small amount of money."

Brazil has an agricultural production system that relies on mechanism and chemicals, said Francisco Dalchiavon, National Coordinator of MST for Santa Catarina.

"It is a model that expels the smallholder. It pushes out smallholders from their land, and it doesn't need manual labor, so it leaves landless peasants no work."

Recent studies show that this concentration of land is becoming more intense, fueled by an explosive expansion of large agribusiness interests, growing monocultures of soy and cotton, in the country.