

## The Case of Father Jentel

*The conviction and sentencing in Brazil of Father Francois Jentel to a 10-year prison term has been protested by the Committee on Social Development and World Peace of the U.S. Catholic Conference. In a statement issued October 19, the committee termed the charges brought against Father Jentel "patently false" and said it was joining in a protest filed with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in the Case of Father Jentel. The committee said that what the French missionary did in Brazil was to "assist the people in their legitimate struggle to continue farming their land and to resist the forceful encroachment of powerful, monied interests from outside the region." The text of the committee's statement follows.*

When Father Francois Jentel, a disciple of Charles de Foucauld, left France nearly twenty years ago for one of the most remote regions of Brazil's Mato Grosso, he expected to

be rewarded, not imprisoned, for his actions.

What Father Jentel and the others have done is assist the people in their legitimate struggle to continue farming their land and to resist the forceful encroachment of powerful, monied interests from outside the region. Every legal and non-violent means has been employed by Father Jentel and two successive bishops, going as far as a personal request to the

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presidency of the republic in 1967, but the monied interests, together with the military, have continued to deprive the people of Sao Felix of their basic rights. And they have now deprived the people of their friend, the priest of

live out his life in the same obscurity as the Indians and displaced peasants who barely eke out their subsistence in that desperately poor area. Today his name appears in the press of many countries. The case of Father Jentel, and that of his heroic bishop, Dom Pedro Casaldaliga, of the priests and religious of the Sao Felix Prelature and of a dozen or more dedicated lay workers—all of whom have been harrassed, threatened and arrested at one time or another and some of whom are still being held incommunicado—has become a *cause celebre* in Europe, North America and many parts of Latin America.

On May 28 of this year Father Jentel began serving a ten-year prison sentence, having been convicted of charges of subversion so patently false and absurd that his bishop has offered to be jailed in his stead. The one civilian judge on the five-man military tribunal which handed down the judgment declared in his dissenting opinion that Father Jentel should be

Santa Terezinha.

Systematic violation of the rights of individuals (such as Father Jentel, Bishop Casaldaliga and their co-workers), communities (such as Santa Terezinha) and entire ethnic groups (such as the Tapirape Indians of the region) are still tragically common in this 25th anniversary year of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Comparable situations, affecting especially native peoples of the Americas, have occurred recently in other parts of the hemisphere. It is time for all who have eyes to see and a conscience to guide them to speak out against such injustice.

Therefore, we, the Committee on Social Development and World Peace of the USCC, join in the protest already filed with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights by the USCC Division for Latin America. We also urge others to express their concern to the Inter-American Commission and we especially urge the National Conference of Catholic Bishops to address itself specifically to the issue of human rights in Brazil during their annual fall meeting. The Church in the United States cannot ignore the sufferings of its sister Church in Brazil and must strive to find ever more effective ways of expressing love and solidarity with the bishops, priests and people of Brazil.