

living freely in brazil

Marcos Penna Sattamini de Arruda, a geologist from Rio de Janeiro, was held as a political prisoner in Brazil from May 11, 1970 to February 1, 1971. In the following letter, addressed to Pope Paul VI, he gives a detailed account of his treatment at the hands of the Brazilian military authorities. Sattamini went to Rome in June with Father Mike Colonnese, Director of the Latin American Bureau of the United States Catholic Conference and of CICOP (Catholic Inter-American Cooperation Program), to thank Pope Paul for his intervention in securing Sattamini's release from prison. The two intended to speak with the Holy Father about political prisoners throughout Latin America and the United States, but the audience which they had requested through the Pontifical Commission *Justitia et Pax* was not granted. Instead on June 23, they released this letter which was dated February 4, 1971.

Your Holiness:

This is an account of what happened to me during this almost nine months of imprisonment. I hope to be able to convey to people still committed to freedom and human dignity a better idea of the fairness of my ideals of justice and of the despair and ferocity with which the military power in Brazil has abused those who disagree with it or those who try to cooperate in the building of a more just and better united country.

first arrest

I was arrested May 11, 1970, in the city of Sao Paulo, when I was on my way to lunch with a girl I had recently met. I learned afterwards that she had belonged to a political organization. She had been arrested a few days

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earlier. She was violently tortured and taken by the *Operacao Bandeirantes* (OB) a police organization for the repression of subversion, composed of officers and sergeants of the army and of the municipal police of Sao Paulo, under the direct jurisdiction of the Second Army) to the restaurant where we were to meet for lunch.

Even before I got to her, I was picked up and taken to a car bearing a fake license, by four policemen heavily armed who took me to the headquarters of the OB, on Tutuia Street, district of Ibirapuera. On the way there the head of the team ordered the girl to show me her hands, so that I "could have an idea of what was awaiting me." She stretched out her hands, in handcuffs, and I saw that both were swollen; they looked twice as thick as normal, and were covered with purple hematomata. I understood that she had suffered a heavy beating with some sort of a ferule. As soon as the car came to a full stop in the patio of the OB, I was thrown out of it and right there and then started the blows and kicks within sight of some people sitting at the foot of some stairs. I went up the steps suffering violent blows until we reached a room in the topmost floor where they kept beating me, striking blows at my head and hitting both my ears with cupped hands; the handcuffs were removed and they continued with their beating while asking me questions.

torture

I was ordered to take off all my clothes. I obeyed. I was made to sit on the floor and my hands were tied with a rough rope while one of the six or seven policemen who were there stepped on them so that the rope could be tightened to its fullest. I felt that my hands were being strangled. My knees were forced between my elbows until my hands were level with my ankles, and the knees level with my chin. A metal bar of approximately eight centimeters in diameter was then pushed between my knees and my elbows and I was suspended above the floor with each end of the metal bar resting on wooden stands so that my body was twice folded over, the head to one side and the back of the hip and the legs to the other, hanging from about one meter high. After beating me



with their fists and clubs a wire was wrapped around the small toe on my left foot and another was placed between my testicles and my leg. These wires were connected to a magnet operated field telephone, and the current ran through the body from pole to pole, increasing in intensity with the speed in which the crank lever was made to turn. I thus began to receive violent shocks while the beating continued, this time with the aid of a perforated ferule which left one of my buttocks with a completely black hematoma, larger than an outstretched hand. The shocks and the beating went on for many hours.

I had been brought to this place at about 2:30 p.m. and night was beginning to fall when I started to lose consciousness and the mobility of my eyelids. When I first began to faint, water was thrown all over my body in order to increase the flow of electricity. Next, one end of the wire was removed from my testicles and they began to rub it on my face and on my head, applying horrible shocks inside my ears, mouth and nostrils. "Look!" said one of the policemen, "it even sparkles! Stick it inside one of his ears, now." This torturing squad followed the orders of Lieutenant Albernaz and was composed of about six men, among whom were Sergeants Tomas, Matuicio, Chico and Paulinho. I thought that I wouldn't survive, so fierce and long lasting were the tortures. I began to feel completely drenched of life and a cold sweat formed over my body. I was unable by then to even move my eyelids. My tongue curled up inside my mouth, I could hardly breathe and was unable to speak. I tried to recall throughout all of it the names of the great men who went through horrors for noble and great ideals. Here I was made to suffer for trying to achieve a world with more love and greater contact among men. This inspired me to resist and not to surrender myself into despair. Gaetano seemed to have started setting in on my hands after hours of interrupted circulation. "My hands, my hands!" I moaned, and they hit them with clubs. Finally, I think I must have lost consciousness. When I came to, the metal bar had been lowered and I lay untied on the floor. They tried to pep me up with ammonia but I just lay inanimate. Blows with the end of the metal bar hit my



testicles. My shoulder was burned with the live end of cigarettes. The barrel of a gun was pushed down my throat with the threat that they were going to fire. They said they would rape me. All of a sudden my body shook and I began to writhe as if I had been overtaken by an earthquake. The policemen panicked and called in a first aid doctor. They said I was a soldier who had been taken ill. I was given an injection, my request for water was denied (my body was completely dehydrated), and I was left to sleep in the same room where I had been tortured.

Next morning I woke up with someone violently shaking me by the shoulders. I felt that I still shook, my eyelids were down, my tongue was curled up inside my mouth, and strange muscular contractions pulled at the right side of my face. My left leg was stiff as a piece of wood with foot twisted downwards and the toes motionlessly contracted in a spasm. The small toe was nothing but a mere piece of charcoal. After much cursing it was decided that I was to be taken to Sao Paulo's Army General Hospital. My left foot was hit with a succession of strong kicks in an attempt at returning it to its normal position to fit in the shoe but in spite of the excruciating pain it remained the same and the shoes were left behind. I was grabbed by my legs and arms and carried off like a bag to the patio where I was then thrown into the back of a pickup truck.

hospitalization

I later learned that upon arrival at the hospital it was believed that I wouldn't last another two hours. A priest, the hospital's lieutenant-chaplain, came up to me for confession. He asked the policemen who guarded my cell to leave but they refused. The priest thus not being able to give me confession, gave me absolution "in extremis" in case I died! I was for many days put through interrogations in the same hospital, in spite of my health showing practically no signs of improvement. On my fifth day in the hospital the door to my cell was opened and two policemen entered: "New! that this... is alone, let us finish him off. You're gonna die now, you..." they said, and one of them started hitting me on my body and

face. I tried to save myself and to shout but my body shook incessantly. I had great difficulty in moving about, and my tongue, as if tied up in a knot inside my mouth, prevented me from screaming out loud. Besides, I could hardly see them for my eyelids remained droopy in front of my eyes: "With Sergio Adao nobody can! Die, you . . .," said one of them. They both left the room to check as to whether there was anyone around and returned to continue with the beating. I finally managed to let out a scream. They got afraid and left the room. I later complained to the nun who assisted me, to the nurses, and also to the officers who were to look after my safety and after two days the guards were changed, and the OB policemen (municipal police) were sent away.

I remained in that hospital for two and a half months. Throughout that time I was on many occasions put under interrogation. Action was taken on my behalf by relatives who unsuccessfully tried to locate me for over a month. At last a small handwritten note got to me which was an assurance that they had finally found me. I remained, however, in solitary confinement without permission to see any of my relatives for five months and without access to a lawyer throughout the entire period of my imprisonment.

Upon my release from the hospital my right eyelid still hung limp (and remained that way until December), my shoulders and arms shook slightly and continuously, and with my left leg partially crippled, not offering me any support. I still availed myself of a broken broomstick that served me as a walking cane. During the time I spent in that hospital I received the most devoted care from Sister Catarina, from the nurses Nina and Juracy and from the attendant Helio as well. I also met several soldiers who had been admitted into the Eighth Infirmary, among whom were Cardoso, Ivan Tome and his family, Mota, etc.

I was examined by several doctors, from the Vice-Director Lieutenant Colonel Dr. Aquino on down to Doctors Oscar, Elias, Mota and others. The security officer in charge of the hospital was Major Sadi, who many times chatted with me and kept in constant contact with my family. He was later replaced by another major

who entrusted Lieutenant Constantino with representing him in the daily task.

forced testimony

Once back at OB I was locked in a cell and ordered to write a confession. The food served was bread and coffee in the morning and a cooked dish at 5:00 p.m. I concluded testimony on the third day and was afterwards questioned in presence of the girl. It was 6:00 p.m. when I was taken to the cell where she was. They wanted me to confess the name of the organization to which they supposed I belonged, and gave the names of alleged friends. They started it all by taking the girl out of the room and applying a strong electric shock to her in order to make me talk. (They were afraid of torturing me again because I hadn't yet regained my health.) I heard her screaming and when she was brought in again I saw that she was shaking from head to toe and was beside herself. I was appalled at such an atrocity, and even more so when they threatened to do the same thing with my relatives if I didn't talk in the terms they wanted. They again applied another shock to the girl but since they did not succeed in making me say what they wanted, they decided to send for a physician to check on my health, and asked him whether I was fit to be again put under torture. The physician prescribed some pills and ordered that my food be suspended. I was taken back to my cell only to be recalled a little later.

On seeing that they were ready to inflict the girl with further suffering, and possibly also my relatives, and already knowing from my own experience that they were capable of the utmost atrocities, I decided to spare them and agreed to write another testimony.

I was shown into the office of Captain Dauro, who along with another lieutenant offered me coffee and cigarettes and enthusiastically advised me to collaborate with them, etc. I started talking by saying that I would not collaborate with those who represented the regime of force and violence in which we were living and who so inhumanly treated those against whom they had nothing to hold. This irritated them and they went into another



round of beating up the girl in order to make me say what they wanted to hear. They next turned against me, alternating between the girl and me, with violence, blows, foul language and moral offenses, attempts at strangling, blindfolds, repeated threats towards relatives, a loaded gun repeatedly pushed against my forehead, all in an attempt at making me say what they wanted to hear. Hours later they took away the girl and afterwards I was taken back to my cell. The following persons took part in this episode: Major Gil, Chief of OB, in the beginning; Captain Dauro; Captain Faria; jailer Roberto; a fat lieutenant with red hair and red mustache; another one, taller and heavier; a thin black young man and two others whose features I do not recall. All of them were dressed in civilian clothes.

Next day, late in the afternoon when they came for me I was in the midst of a convulsion; the right-hand side of my face was collected in a spasmodic contraction, spit frothed out of my mouth and my whole body writhed incessantly. When it subsided I was transferred to a cell in the prisoners wing, of the other building, where I joined two other prisoners. This prison is secured by a steel door and two barred doors; inside, cells line both sides of a corridor guarded by a squad of the *força publica* (municipal police) headed by a corporal, all in uniform.

Next morning, I was taken to the patio. My condition had worsened considerably and the tremor that shook my body was stronger and constant. My picture was taken, I was fingerprinted and then led to a room on the floor that they used for tortures where I met a PE (military police) sergeant dressed in uniform; a piece of adhesive tape over his pocket concealed his name. For forty minutes I was questioned by this sergeant, sometimes tactfully and others with threats of torture and death if I did not confess all that they wanted me to. He then said that he was a physician and knew that I would die if he released me to be tortured again. He finally gave up, gave me an anti-spasmodic injection and said that I should be taken back again to the hospital. I was locked in a washroom, for the rest of the night. Later a physician by the name of Primo Alfredo, just arrested, was also locked in with me. That night, as always before, we heard the desperate cries

of the other prisoners under tortures which lasted for days.

second hospitalization

Next morning, I was taken back to the HG (General Hospital) along with a young man who had been brought into OB two days earlier with a bullet wound in the arm. He had been tortured since he arrived and until his wounded arm began to get infected. He was then transferred to the hospital to have the bullet extracted; in addition to the wounded arm, his two hands in bandages were purple from all the beating and his mouth was all burned from the electric shocks. In addition to having his tongue tied with an electric wire he had also been made to sit on the "dragon's chair" with electric shocks applied all over his body. I believe his name is Arlindo. Next morning he was operated on under general anesthesia. In the afternoon the OB policemen came back to fetch him and he wasn't brought back.

There was also a lady prisoner in the HG; she was over fifty years old and arrived from OB with a badly swollen face and emotionally very disturbed, who was insistently questioned by the OB policemen. I later learned that she was the mother of a girl who had been arrested for an attempt at kidnapping an airplane.

Two days later my condition began to worsen and I entered into a state of unconsciousness and delirium that lasted for more than ten days. I was later told of what happened during that time. Thanks to insistent pleas from my family, Major Sadi, who had already been transferred to the HG of the Second Army, came to visit me. Upon finding me in that condition, he was frightened and demanded that appropriate action be taken. I was then treated by a psychiatrist, Dr. Elias, who for about eight days gave me serum and put me through two electroshocks until I regained consciousness. For I came to, I noticed that I had a new cellmate, an Argentinian called Hugo Miguel Moreno, who had been arrested and tortured at the DOPS and OB; he had been through shocks, *pau de arara*—"parrot's perch" (the metal bar through the legs and arms), dragon's chair and beatings,

discharge from the hospital she was taken again to the PE and from there to the BIB in Parra Mansa where she was again brutally tortured, suffering among other things, two broken ribs.

This coming and going of prisoners victims of tortures is almost endless in the General Hospital of Sao Paulo, as well as in the Army Central Hospital. The hospital service is to patch up (*reacuchar* - "retread") the patients so that they can be taken back as soon as possible to torture. The physician in charge of the victims is Major Wilson Botta, M.D., a dermatologist, who renders practically no assistance to the patients, and in general deals with them as if with animals, under shouts and threats. All the ordeals and attendants in the Thirteenth Infirmary are witnesses to the condition, upon arrival, of all political prisoners from the PE. The officer in charge of security at the HCG is Captain Moraes.

On December 22, I was discharged and taken under heavy escort to the PE, where I remained for three days without any medication. On the first day a record was made (photographs, fingerprinting) after which I was locked alone in a cell where the only thing I could hear was the sporadic screams of the torture victims. Due to the lack of medication the convulsions returned and I was taken back to the HCG. I was kept there for over a month to allow the effacing of the obvious signs of the brutalities I had been subjected to. However, although already released, I am still under anti-convulsion medical treatment, my left leg is atrophied two centimeters in relation to my right one and my shoulders bear the scars of cigarette burns.

confession

By the middle of November, policemen from the DOPS of Sao Paulo came over for my written confession in the presence of witnesses. In this confession I pointed out that I had never had any previous physical health problem let alone any of a nervous nature. I learned however through Colonel Otavio Medeiros, who cooperated for my release, that somewhere in my confession there was a statement to the effect that I had admitted to having

suffered convulsive attacks prior to being arrested and tortured. That proves that my confession was unduly modified with the addition of false statements, after the document had been signed by myself and by the witnesses.

release

Finally, on February 1, 1971, I was again released from the HCG, after elimination of a series of "bureaucratic difficulties," as alleged by the authorities, such as the mix-up of my papers with those of a revolutionary charged with bank assaults (robberies). I was taken, under escort, to the Ministry of the Army to be interviewed by Lieutenant Colonel Melo, Chief of the PE of the *Exercito*, Special Police of the First Army. During this interview, which lasted for over an hour, that lieutenant colonel and a major of the PE asserted that I was an inveterate subversive whose mind had not been changed. He said that he had no reason to be friends with me and that "for as long as we can we shall fight you and the likes of you to prevent socialism from taking roots in Brazil." He went on to add: "I know that your mother is conducting a propaganda against Brazil in the United States. She is a naturalized citizen, but you are Brazilian, and you are under complete jurisdiction, do you understand?" She had disclosed the truth about my conditions abroad in her attempt through influential pressures to help me regain my freedom and also to prevent other people from suffering the same horrors that I and so many men and women have experienced. Finally, the lieutenant colonel said that if I ever happened to fall in their hands again, for whatever reason, I could well imagine what my end would be.

When I later saw that lieutenant colonel again, this time in the company of grandmother and father, he renewed his threats in front of them. He added that the fact that I had been a student in a Jesuit seminary further explained my subversive tendencies, since the Jesuits as well as the Dominicans were increasingly implicated in subversion. He went on to say that it is very easy today to distort the papal messages on behalf of social