

## How Europe can stop funding land grabs in Brazil

*Land conflicts in the Amazon often involve agribusiness, causing violence and deforestation. The state of Pará, with the highest deforestation rate in Brazil, is a hotspot for such conflicts.*

*"The violence against people comes with the violence against nature. The people in Europe don't know that they are consuming meat tainted with human blood," says Polliane Barbosa Santos Reis, a defender and representative of the Brazil's Landless Rural Workers Movement.*

In 2014, Polliane Barbosa Santos Reis became a part of a community comprising thousands who moved back to their public land homes in the Brazilian Amazon state of Pará. In the years that followed, the community has been shot at and had their plantations and homes burnt down, as a conflict with a local cattle ranch has escalated. For years, JBS – the world's biggest meat processing company with operations in Europe – bought cattle directly from ranch owner Rafael Saldanha despite clear evidence of the ongoing land dispute.

The expansion of ranching and plantations is causing disputes over land in the Amazon. Almost a third of all registered land-related conflicts are linked to the agribusiness sector. The state of Pará is at the epicentre of this conflict, having the highest deforestation rate in Brazil. This has coincided with an increase in violence against local communities nationwide. The Polliane community has faced violence, threats, and intimidation due to environmental harm and a lack of responsibility. There were 1,496 recorded murders of peasant workers between 1995 and 2008.

### **Polliane's community targeted by cattle rancher, Rafael Saldanha**

In 2008, the landless community of Polliane, created the Hugo Chavez settlement on public land in Brazil. This land was legally protected from being bought or sold by ranchers. They requested an inquiry into the potentially unlawful acquisition of the Fazenda Santa Tereza ranch. In 2009, Rafael Saldanha purchased the ranch, causing Polliane's community to depart with guarantees of legal justice. They went back in 2014, concerned about unfairness and the potential violation of their rights.

Saldanha, a well-known rancher, is accused of environmental crimes, taking land illegally, and being involved in a murder case. Prosecutors in Pará charged him in 2019 for obtaining public land unlawfully relating to Fazenda Santa Tereza. He challenges the penalty for using slave labour, and an inquiry discovered unlawful deforestation on another ranch. Saldanha denies allegations of violating human rights and committing murder.

Community members witnessed violent acts committed by armed individuals linked to ranchers. According to one witness, they were forced to lie on the ground and shot at close

range. The perpetrators also set fire to their vehicles, motorcycles, and homes, and cruelly threw live dogs into the flames. As the victims fled, the attackers continued shooting in their direction. Polliane emphasizes that the violence experienced is more severe than reported, providing insight into the challenging situation faced by those living under constant attack.

## Ineffectiveness of Voluntary Commitments

These reports of official investigations and allegations of murder, environmental damage and human rights abuses were well known when JBS bought cattle from Rafael Saldanha. The purchases stopped in 2021 following an investigation by Global Witness. For years, however, JBS had made a voluntary commitment to exclude ranchers involved in land grabbing from its supply chain. This shows that attempts to exclude land grabbing from a company's operations are ineffective if they are voluntary.

The current draft of a new EU law could help clean up companies' overseas operations - and move away from empty voluntary commitments. But the text as it stands would fail to protect communities like Polliane's. The law aims to make companies operating in the EU carry out checks to help eliminate human rights and environmental abuses in their international value chains. But it does not require companies like JBS to engage meaningfully with communities that may be threatened by their operations. It also obliges communities to overcome complex legal obstacles if they want justice.

Lara Wolters, a Member of the European Parliament, remarked: *"We are living in a world that was designed to enable large international companies to generate profits and was constructed – legally – to shield them in their actions, rather than holding them accountable."* Wolters pointed out that the law lacks three important core pieces to protect people and promote justice: making companies talk to local communities, making it easier for people to take legal action, and giving help to victims when companies don't carry out proper checks. She stressed that if used properly, this law would end impunity and greed and insure, that companies can no longer turn a blind eye, nor claim that they had no idea that their beef came from a conflict region. Companies wouldn't be able to ignore problems or say they didn't know about issues like sourcing products from conflict zones.

As the EU negotiates to complete this law, it must give priority to communities like Polliane's and require companies to engage with them actively. This involves continuous, secure, and comprehensive communication with communities, not only when it benefits companies financially.

*Quelle: Bei dem hier angeführten Text handelt es sich um eine vereinfachte, verkürzte Version des Artikels „How Europe can stop funding land grabs in Brazil“ vom 30. Mai 2022 auf [globalwitness.org](https://www.globalwitness.org/en/blog/how-europe-can-stop-funding-land-grabs-brazil/). Der Originalartikel ist hier zu finden: <https://www.globalwitness.org/en/blog/how-europe-can-stop-funding-land-grabs-brazil/>*