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Brazilian court: Rancher convicted of nun's 2005 murder gets new trial

Lise Alves Catholic News Service | May. 17, 2013
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Brazil's highest court has annulled the trial of rancher Vitalmiro Bastos de Moura, convicted of masterminding the 2005 assassination of U.S.-born Sr. Dorothy Stang.

The Supreme Court ruled Moura's attorneys did not have enough time to prepare for the 2010 trial. This was the third time Moura had been tried for ordering the murder.

In 2007, Moura was sentenced to 30 years in jail for masterminding the assassination. In Brazil, if a person is sentenced for more than 20 years, he has the right to be retried with a new jury.

During the 2008 trial, Moura was declared innocent of the charges.

In 2009, the verdict was annulled by the courts of the state of Para, and Moura was tried again in 2010. He was found guilty and sentenced to 30 years. His retrial date has not yet been set, but the Supreme Court has ordered that he remain in jail until the new trial.

The Catholic church's Pastoral Land Commission said "the regrettable decision by the country's highest court serves only to intensify the land conflicts and deaths in Brazil's rural regions."

Stang, a naturalized Brazilian citizen, was a member of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and a native of Dayton, Ohio, but lived in the Amazon region for nearly four decades. The 73-year-old nun worked closely with the Pastoral Land Commission in favor of land rights for the poor and for sustainable development in the region.

The other four men involved in the murder are in jail, serving sentences that range from 17 to 30 years.

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