

Rancher claims he never paid for murder of American nun

SAO PAULO, Brazil - A rancher on trial for ordering the February 2005 assassination of U.S. Sister Dorothy Stang claimed he is innocent of paying \$25,000, along with another rancher, for her murder.

Vitalmiro Bastos de Moura, known in the Amazon region as Bida, said in court May 14 he did not know Sister Dorothy, a member of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, and only had contact with her two assassins after she was dead.

Mr. De Moura said the two men found guilty of killing the nun came to him after the crime and confessed the assassination.

Mr. De Moura's trial began May 14 in the northern city of Belem, in the state of Para, amid calls from the nun's family members and friends that justice must be served.

Sister Dorothy, a native of Dayton, Ohio, was 73 when she was murdered on an isolated road near the town of Anapu. She had lived in Brazil for nearly four decades and was known in the region as a fierce defender of a sustainable development project for the Amazon forest.

Mr. De Moura, other ranchers and loggers were opposed to the project.

In December 2005 the convicted assassins, Rayfran das Neves Sales and Clodoaldo Carlos Batista, were sentenced, respectively, to 27 and 17 years behind bars. The middleman who hired them, Amair Feijoli da Cunha, known as Tato, received an 18-year jail sentence in May 2006. The other rancher accused of ordering the killing, Regivaldo Pereira Galvao, was jailed briefly, released and awaits trial.

In court, Mr. Sales recanted his earlier testimony and stated that Mr. De Moura had not ordered the killing.

David Stang, Sister Dorothy's brother who attended the trial, sent a letter in early May to Para Gov. Ana Julia de Vasconcelos Carepa asking for justice.

Mr. Stang said in the letter that his sister's "ultimate sacrifice presents Para and Brazil with the opportunity to show that justice can prevail."