



## Survivor Stories

### Two Brothers Escape: Elias and Nerisvan's Story

Their living and working conditions were dangerous and dreadful. They endured frequent exposure to toxic chemicals. But now, the two are free. They've received critical medical care and thousands of dollars in compensation from the Brazilian cattle rancher who enslaved them.

#### Brothers in Slavery

Elias Vieira da Silva and Nerisvan da Silva Elias survived day by day. Housed in a dilapidated shack, sleeping on hammocks, pelted by rain. They had no clean drinking water. There was no bathroom. They were responsible for clearing brush and applying pesticides to control weeds in pastures at a cattle ranch—with no personal protective equipment.

"I once asked for a cape to protect me from the poison," Elias recalls. "The boss told me to use an old bag, so that's what I did." The brothers were totally dependent on a ranch hand for all their food. When Elias asked for money to buy meat himself, he was told: "the poor were born to be poor, and rich to be rich."



The São Lucas farm is just six miles from the city of Araguaína, but the two could not escape. The farm boss threatened they would never be paid if they tried to leave. Still, Nerisvan was worried about his older brother's exposure to toxic chemicals.

#### An Urgent Plea – A Quick Response

One day, Nerisvan slipped away from the ranch to seek help from the local office of the *Comissão Pastoral da Terra*, or CPT (Pastoral Land Commission), a group that has partnered with Free the Slaves on the front lines in Brazil. Noting the urgency of the situation, CPT snapped into action, triggering a raid by a local prosecutor and the Ministry of Labor's special slavery strike force. Together, they conducted the rescue.

“It was a Thursday,” Elias says, “where the labor supervisors and a prosecutor set us free. They got us out of that farm, where we were humiliated by the boss and his son.”

The brothers were severely contaminated by the pesticides. CPT and local authorities ensured they were treated at the city hospital and received prescription medication. Authorities also imposed significant fines on the ranch owner. The brothers were surprised to receive approximately \$4,370 (U.S.) including back pay and compensation for damages.



### **Sustainable Freedom**

The compensation was more than they could have imagined—and the funds will help fulfill many of their hopes and dreams: owning a home, raising their own animals, supporting their families. Elias and Nerisvan are finally safe. Back home, more than 600 miles from the ranch where they were rescued, Elias bought a small piece of land. CPT helped ensure the two were enrolled in Brazil's social programs for slavery survivors.