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News Flash

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Brazil: Authorities must take action to avoid "blood bath"

Unless the authorities in Rio de Janeiro take immediate steps to restore order to the communities of Vigário Geral and Parada de Lucas in Rio de Janeiro, an escalation in fighting between rival drug gangs is inevitable and a "blood bath" will ensue in which many innocent people are likely to die, according to information passed on to Amnesty International.

"Immediate steps must be taken to restore order to both communities in order to guarantee the safety of the civilian population," Amnesty International said.

The gangs of Vigário Geral and Parada de Lucas have been fighting for over 20 years. On Sunday a group of heavily armed men from the *favela* Parada de Lucas occupied the *favela* of Vigário Geral, expelling dozens of families who they allege have links with the rival gang.

Hundreds of people have been forced to leave their homes and take refuge in surrounding communities. This includes a group of 100 sheltering in a crèche in the *favela* Dique. Yesterday a group of heavily armed police and drug traffickers were involved in intense gun battles in the streets around the crèche.

"Despite their presence in the surrounding the area, it appears that the Rio police have not attempted to regain control of either the *favelas* of Vigário Geral or Parada de Lucas, despite the clear threats that this situation poses to the civilian population. The reasons for this lack of action are not clear," Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International urges the authorities to ensure that any efforts to restore order to the situation are carried out in a manner that respects the safety and human rights of the civilian population.

Background

Amnesty International has monitored the situation in Vigário Geral for years. In 1993 21 innocent civilians were killed in an attack by police officers. For more information on the situation in Rio de Janeiro, please see the report "Rio de Janeiro 2003: Candelária and Vigário Geral 10 years on": AMR 19/015/2003.

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5566

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