

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 19/008/2009

02 June 2009

UA 138/09
BRAZIL

Fear for safety
Marcelo Freixo, m
Vinicius George, m

State parliamentarian Marcelo Freixo and his aide Vinicius George are at risk of being assassinated by *milicia* groups in Rio de Janeiro. Plans were discovered by police when they raided a *milicia* group in May. The raid was part of a long-term police operation against members of *milicia* groups who have taken control of over a hundred shanty towns in Rio de Janeiro. Police found letters from the head of a *milicia* in Rio das Pedras, a bairro in the west of the city, a former sergeant in the military police, requesting support from another *milicia* group to assassinate the two men.

At the end of the police operation no efforts were made to detain the head of the Rio das Pedras *milicia*, who sent the request to assassinate Marcelo Freixo and Vinicius George. Although both men are being provided with some protection Amnesty International believes that this should be reinforced immediately, in accordance with the wishes of both men.

Marcelo Freixo and Vinicius George began to receive death threats in June 2008, when Marcelo Freixo was appointed as president of a parliamentary inquiry (*Comissão Parlamentar de Inquérito*, CPI) into the growth of *milicias* in Rio de Janeiro.

The CPI consisted of a panel of elected officials which investigated patterns of state government involvement in the illegal activities of the *milicias* before presenting a final report, submitted to the state parliament and to the public prosecutor's office for any potential criminal prosecutions. There is concern however, that municipal, state and federal authorities have not fully implemented recommendations set out in the CPI report, especially those aimed at criminalising and prosecuting the activities that bring them funding. This has meant the *milicias* continue to expand despite the arrest of a few of its key members.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The *milicias* are made up of off-duty police officers, prison guards and firemen who have ousted drug dealers from *favelas* allegedly offering security. However, they effectively control communities with violence, while extorting money for the provision of security, as well as gas, transport, cable TV and other services. They are accused of wielding political power by guaranteeing, through intimidation, votes for certain state deputies. The *milicias* have existed in Rio de Janeiro for some time but their sudden expansion dates back to December 2006, when over 100 *favelas* were invaded by *milicia* groups.

Attempts to investigate and denounce the role of the *milicias* in Rio de Janeiro have been met with threats and violence, including the abduction and torture of three reporters from the newspaper O Dia along with one resident in May 2008 and the bombing of a police station in July.

The growth of the *milicia* groups can be attributed to decades of public security policy based on negligence, human rights violations and impunity of perpetrators, allowing criminal and corrupt police officers to thrive at the cost of those working tirelessly to serve the community. Following recent newspaper reports citing lax security and privileges enjoyed by police officers held in detention in the '*Batalhão Especial Prisional*', special prison unit, in which police officers are held, there is added concern for the safety of the two men. The report states police investigations have uncovered cases of officers being allowed out of the prison to threaten or kill witnesses. Police investigations have cited the prison as a recruiting ground for assassins. Several *militia* members are being held there.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Portuguese or your own language:

- ensuring that Marcelo Freixo, Vinicius George all those working to combat the activities of the *milicias* are provided with effective protection, in accordance with their wishes;
- urging the authorities to promptly conduct an independent and impartial investigation into all threats against Marcelo Freixo, Vinicius George and those found responsible to be brought to justice;
- urging the authorities to publicly denounce the activities of the *milicias* and set out a joint plan, with a clear timeline, to implement all recommendations of the CPI to combat the spread of *milicias* and organised crime;
- requesting that effective steps are taken to bring to justice the leaders and the members of the *milicias*.
- urging the authorities to take immediate steps to investigate the activities in the *Batalhão Especial Prisional*, and those authorities found to be involved in criminal activity be brought to justice.

APPEALS TO:

Minister of Justice

Exmo. Ministro da Justiça do Brasil

Sr. Tarso Fernando Herz Genro

Ministério da Justiça

Esplanada dos Ministérios,

Bloco "T"

70.712-902 - Brasília/DF, Brazil

Fax: + 55 61 3322 6817

Salutation: Vossa Excelência/Your Excellency

Rio de Janeiro State Governor

Exmo. Governador

Sr. Sérgio de Oliveira Cabral Santos Filho

Palácio Guanabara,

Rua Pinheiro Machado, s/nº – Laranjeiras

22.231-090 – Rio de Janeiro/RJ, Brazil

Fax: +55 21 2299 5691

Salutation: Exmo. Governador

Rio de Janeiro State Public Prosecutors' Office

Exmo Sr Procurador-Geral de Justiça

Dr. Cláudio Soares Lopes

Av Marechal Câmara, 370, 8º andar - Centro

20.020-080 - Rio de Janeiro/RJ – Brazil

Fax: +55 21 2550-9054

Salutation: Exmo Sr Procurador

COPIES TO:

Rio de Janeiro State Deputy

Sr. Marcelo Freixo

Rua Dom Manoel, s/nº,

Ed. 23 de Julho - Centro

20.010-090 - Rio de Janeiro/RJ, Brazil

and to diplomatic representatives of Brazil accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 14 July.