

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Brazil: Presidential Stamp on Impunity**

The resignation of Justice Minister, Miguel Reale Junior, reflects the extent of the frustration and disenchantment of those who are fighting for human rights in Brazil today. His resignation comes after the announcement by the Federal Attorney General, Geraldo Brindeiro, that he would not support recommendations for a federal intervention in the state of Espírito Santo.

"Once again the country's authorities have allowed an important opportunity to combat long-standing human rights abuse, organised crime, corruption and impunity to be overridden by political expediency," Amnesty International stated today.

Dr Brindeiro had earlier publicly expressed support for the recommendation made by the Ministry of Justice's Human Rights council (*Conselho de Defesa dos Direitos da Pessoa Humana*) for intervention, one day after attending the hearings held by the council in Vitória, capital of Espírito Santo.

In light of this development, Amnesty International is particularly concerned that the decision of the Federal Attorney General seems to have been directly influenced by political and electoral considerations, following a meeting between president Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Dr Brindeiro held yesterday, especially as no apparent judicial reasons for the decision have been made public as of yet.

"A recommendation that was lauded as historic three days ago has now been quashed, clearly underlining the long held belief that eight years of human rights promises have been consistently undermined by back room political dealing," Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International is concerned that the promise of a joint federal and state task force to investigate the many documented cases of executions and killings, in lieu of federal intervention, may be compromised by participation of state authorities who could be the very focus of such investigations.

The Federal Attorney General's determination to overrule the recommendation of the Ministry of Justice's Human Rights Council will undoubtedly be interpreted by some as a message of support for those responsible for the litany of unpunished abuses and killings suffered by so many in the state.

Amnesty International calls on the national and international human rights community not to allow this decision to be seen as a victory for those who have enjoyed state sanctioned impunity for so long.

"At this time more than ever support must be shown for those human rights defenders who have fought for justice in Espírito Santo in the face of overwhelming attacks, death threats and intimidation," Amnesty international stated.

The responsibility for their security lies in the hands of the Federal Government. Those responsible for the many killings and executions in the state must finally be brought to justice."

In 1997 the Brazilian Congress opened a Federal Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry into drug trafficking. At least a quarter of the final report was dedicated to the situation in Espírito Santo, with indictments against people in positions of power including the president of the legislative assembly, high ranking judges, and powerful members of the police for various crimes ranging from homicide to tax evasion. Three years after the 1999 publication of these findings, no state police or state judicial investigation has been initiated on the basis of this information.

**Background:**

The Ministry of Justice's Human Rights Council was convened in Espírito Santo following the recent murder of local lawyer Marcelo Denadai. Members of the Council, including respected jurists, human rights defenders and members of the government, heard how years of killing, violence and corruption attributed to the police organization *Scuderie Detetive le Cocq*, and to powerful economic and political groups in the state, have long gone unpunished.

The recommendation of the Human Rights Council underlined the fundamental failures of the state authorities to investigate the systematic human rights abuses which have taken place over so many years in Espírito Santo, and the high levels of corruption which permeate the executive and the legislative in the state.

For more information please see: Brazil: Justice Beckons in Espírito Santo, 5 July 2002 (AI Index: AMR 19/009/2002), <http://www.web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/recent/amr190092002>

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