

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: AMR 19/025/2002 (Public)
News Service No: 167
20 September 2002

Embargo Date: 20 September 2002 17:00 GMT

Brazil: Where are human rights?

Sao Paulo -- The marginality of human rights in the current political climate in Brazil has been once again demonstrated by their absence from the electoral debate, Amnesty International said today.

The organization is today making public an open letter it has presented to the candidates contending for the presidency, only three of whom have agreed to discuss the organization's concerns and proposals.

"It is alarming to see how little attention is paid to the need to put the human rights of all at the heart of political actions -- particularly so in a country like Brazil, where the fundamental rights of vast sectors of society are being routinely violated," Amnesty International said.

"What is even more disturbing is the widespread perception that defending human rights means exclusively defending the rights of criminals, and is perceived as an obstacle to obtaining security through a tough approach to crime. This is a dangerously distorted view, as there can be no real security for anyone if the security of all is not guaranteed," the organization added.

In its letter, the human rights organization summarized its concerns about the practice of torture, which remains widespread and deeply entrenched in the Brazilian justice system despite the existence of a federal law criminalizing it; the alarmingly high numbers of unlawful killings by police and death squads often linked to the police forces; and the appalling conditions of detention across the country.

"Until the scale of the human rights problems afflicting Brazil is fully acknowledged, and until those in power understand that the answer to the public outcry for more public security does not lie in more repressive and abusive policing but in policies based on human rights, the vicious circle of violence, fear and human rights abuses to which Brazilian society is hostage will never be broken," the organization stressed.

To address the situation, Amnesty International is putting forward a series of recommendations, which include the establishment of an independent and effective commission of enquiry into police killings; the creation of a federal human rights ombudsman's office that is independent, fully funded and mandated to investigate human rights violations; and the creation of a fair and independent system to transfer human rights crimes to federal justice.

The organization is also recommending that all cases of torture be investigated and those

responsible brought to justice under the existing torture law.

"We will be following these recommendations up with the candidates and we will seek firm commitments on their part that they will not shirk their responsibility to protect and promote human rights," Amnesty International said.

"We will also insist with the candidates and the incoming government that they should publicly express their support for human rights defenders and develop concrete policies to enable them to carry out their invaluable work without fear of retaliation," the organization concluded.

Public Document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

For latest human rights news view <http://news.amnesty.org>