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Brazil: FEBEM convictions should trigger wide reform

Amnesty International today said the convictions against 14 FEBEM (Fundação Estadual do Bem-Estar do Menor) employees and ex-employees for their involvement in acts of torture in the detention centre are a step in the right direction and it should trigger deep reforms to the juvenile detention system in Brazil.

In particular, Amnesty International urged Sao Paulo's State authorities to:

Ensure the full independence of bodies responsible for the documentation and investigation of cases of torture -- such as the Medical Legal Institute (Insituto Medical Legal).

Comply with measures stipulated in the Statute for Children and Adolescents (Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente, ECA) – including ensuring the physical integrity of all detainees in the FEBEM's care.

Provide police and prison guards with adequate resources and training to enable them to carry out their work without resorting to human rights violations, including torture.

Thoroughly investigate all remaining accusations of torture in juvenile detention centres and bring to justice those involved under Brazil's Torture Law.

The 14 men were convicted yesterday under the Torture Law. The convictions came for their involvement in acts of torture, including beatings with wooden sticks and metal bars, perpetrated against 35 detainees in November 2000 in the Raposo Tavares complex.

Two high ranking officials were sentenced to 87 years, ten guards to 74 years and 8 months and two of the prison directors received 2 years and 2 months for negligence.

"These convictions tackle not only incidents of torture, but, significantly, the key issue of chain-of-command responsibility," said Patrick Wilcken, Amnesty International's campaigner on Brazil.

"It is now essential that Sao Paulo's state authorities take all necessary steps to advance long-overdue reforms," said Patrick Wilcken.

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