

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 19/034/2006

10 October 2006

UA 272/06 Fear for safety

BRAZIL **Mothers of "disappeared" young men from the *favela* (shanty town) of Vigario Geral**

The mothers of 10 boys and young men who "disappeared" in December 2005 are in grave danger after being repeatedly threatened by police and drug traffickers.

The mothers have been involved in a campaign for justice after their sons were taken from Vigario Geral – a *favela* (or shanty town) in Rio de Janeiro's north zone – by drug traffickers, and allegedly tortured to death in the neighbouring *favela*, Parada de Lucas. The bodies of the boys have never been recovered, and judicial inquiries into the incident are stalled. There have been repeated allegations of police involvement in the "disappearances".

Since the "disappearance" of their sons, the mothers have been repeatedly threatened by both drug traffickers and police. "We suffer violence from all sides" ("*a gente sofre violência de todos os lados*"), said one of the mothers. She also reported that a military police officer pointed a gun at her saying he "wouldn't miss the opportunity to blow my head off" ("*não vai perder a oportunidade de explodir minha cabeça*"). On five occasions, men entered the church where the woman goes regularly, on one occasion heavily armed, saying that they would kill her. She has been forced to move house 14 times because of her association with the campaign for justice for her son and the others who "disappeared".

When a group of five of the mothers left the 41st Police Station in Rio's west zone after identifying the alleged leader of the abductors, they were threatened outside the police station by a man who drove by in a car and said he was going to kill one of them "as an example" ("*para dar um exemplo*").

Several of the mothers who still live in Vigario Geral are afraid to leave the community, severely hampering their campaign for justice.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In the early hours of the morning of 13 December, 2005, a group of drug traffickers from the Parada de Lucas *favela* invaded the neighbouring community of Vigario Geral, dressed in police uniforms. They seized 13 boys and young men aged between 13 and 27. Three of the young men were released by their captors after they convinced them that they were not rival traffickers. The other 10 were then allegedly tortured, dismembered and disposed of.

Witnesses testified to police involvement in the case, including the use of an armoured van, known as the *caveirão*, during the kidnapping; an accusation that has been vehemently denied by the police.

A task force was created to investigate the case by the then Public Security Secretary, Dr Marcelo Itagiba, but it was 55 days before police began searching for the bodies. Two suspects accused of torture were released in September after their trial collapsed when witnesses refused to testify. A second case investigating the disappearances is also stalled because of lack of evidence. The *Ministerio Publico*, the Public Prosecutor's Office, is appealing against the results of both cases.

Levels of both criminal and police violence in Rio de Janeiro's *favelas* are extremely high. In Vigario Geral and Parada de Lucas the situation is exacerbated by a long-running violent feud between rival drug factions that has claimed many lives. Police corruption, including involvement with drug and arms trade, has undermined the state's ability to combat criminality in Rio de Janeiro. Of the thousands of cases of police

and criminal killings registered in the *favelas* each year few are adequately investigated. Those campaigning for justice are frequently subject to threats and intimidations.

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

- urging the authorities to take immediate steps to guarantee the safety of the Mothers of Vigario Geral, in accordance with their wishes;
- calling on the authorities to initiate an independent and transparent investigation into the death threats and intimidation the mothers have suffered, and to bring all those responsible to justice;
- making available all necessary resources to bring the perpetrators of the torture and “disappearance” of the 10 kidnapped juveniles to justice;
- expressing concern that police officers appear to be linked to drug factions operating in the *favelas*;
- calling on the authorities to take immediate steps to investigate and combat police corruption.

APPEALS TO:

Governor of Rio de Janeiro

Exma. Governadora de Estado do Rio de Janeiro
Sra. Rosângela Rosinha Garotinho de Oliveira
Palácio Guanabara
Rua Pinheiro Machado, s/nº
Laranjeiras, 22238-900 - Rio de Janeiro – RJ, Brasil

Fax: + 55 21 2553 6247

Salutation: Vossa Excelência

Rio de Janeiro Public Security Secretary

Exmo. Secretário de Segurança Pública do Estado do Rio de Janeiro
Sr. Roberto Precioso
Secretaria de Segurança Pública
Praça Cristiano Ottoni, s/nº - 4º andar
Central do Brasil – Centro, 20221-250 - Rio de Janeiro – RJ, Brasil

Fax: + 55 21 3399 1008

Salutation: Exmo. Sr. Secretário

COPIES TO:

Federal Human Rights Secretary

Exmo. Ministro da Secretaria Especial de Direitos Humanos
Sr. Paulo de Tarso Vannuchi
Esplanada dos Ministérios
Bloco T, 70064-900 - Brasília – DF, Brasil

Fax: + 55 61 3226 7980

Rio de Janeiro State Human Rights Secretary

Exmo. Secretário de Direitos Humanos do Estado do Rio de Janeiro
Sr. Paulo Rogério dos Santos Baía
Secretaria de Estado de Direitos Humanos
Avenida Presidente Vargas, Nº 817 - 26º Andar - Centro
20071-004 - Rio de Janeiro – RJ, Brasil

Fax: + 55 21 3399 1179 (If someone answers, say “Fax, por favor”)

Campaigning organization

Rede contra a Violência
Rua Senador Dantas, 20, salas 1407 e 1408.
Rio de Janeiro, Brasil

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 21 November 2006.