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Brazil: Night of Terror in Rio's Baixada Fluminense District

Rio's authorities must not give up the fight against 'Death Squads' and corruption in the city's police forces, said Amnesty International today in response to the massacre that took place last night in Rio de Janeiro.

At least 30 people, including children, were reportedly killed in two attacks, apparently carried out by a 'Death Squad' in the Baixada Fluminense area of Rio de Janeiro. Reports indicate that the victims were indiscriminately shot by a group of men from a driving car.

"A massacre on this scale has not occurred in Rio since 1993, the year of the Vigário Geral and Candelária massacres. Any hopes that such actions were horrors of the past have been dashed by the events of last night, which show the lengths that 'Death Squads' will go to in order to spread terror and resist attempts by the authorities to stop their activities," said Amnesty International.

According to reports, the Rio state Secretary for Public Security has issued a statement affirming that it is very likely that military police were involved in carrying out the killings.

He also is reported to have said that he believes the massacre was carried out as a reprisal for arrests made yesterday of eight military police in the Baixada district. The men were caught on camera in the act of dumping the bodies of two men in the early hours of the morning outside a local police station. The decapitated head of one of the men, who witnesses say were abducted from a bar hours previously, was thrown over the wall into the grounds of the police station.

The killings of the two men and last night's massacre are believed to be a response to a crackdown on 'Death Squads' and other criminal activity by military police in the Baixada Fluminense. This is part of a general drive against corruption and crime in Rio's police forces, called "Operation Razor on the Flesh". 'Death squads', often linked to local politicians and private security companies and primarily manned by police or ex-police officers, have been active in Baixada Fluminense since the 1960s.

"The Rio state authorities must continue in their efforts to bring those responsible for last night's incidents to justice."

Background Information

It is nearly 12 years since Brazil and the world were appalled by the horrific killings of street children as they lay sleeping outside the Candelária church in central Rio de Janeiro. Only a few weeks later the senseless murder of twenty-one residents of Vigário Geral, a community on the outskirts of the city, served to establish Rio's reputation as one of the world's most violent cities. The shock was all the greater when evidence emerged that both massacres had been carried out by members of Rio's Military Police force, the very

individuals paid, trained and equipped by the state to protect society from crime and violence.

For further information on the Candelária and Vigário Geral massacres, please see: "Rio de Janeiro 2003: Candelária and Vigário Geral 10 years on",
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engamr190152003>

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