

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: AMR 19/034/2005 (Public)
News Service No: 309
2 December 2005

Embargo Date: 2 December 2005 13:00 GMT

Brazil: The greater the violence, the smaller the state protection

Fourteen-year-old schoolboy Douglas Brasil de Paula was playing pinball in a bar. João da Costa Magalhães was sitting at the door of his house. Elizabeth Soares de Oliveira was working in her husband's bar. Rafael da Silva Couto, a 17-year-old schoolboy, was on his bicycle. All of them were shot dead by a "death squad" in the Baixada Fluminense District of Rio de Janeiro on 31 March 2005.

"The killing of 29 people in the Baixada Fluminense is one of the consequences of a public security strategy that has abandoned the country's poor and sentenced all Brazilians to crime and violence," said Tim Cahill, Amnesty International's researcher on Brazil as it launched a report on the issue of public security in the country.

The report, "Brazil: 'They come in Shooting': Policing socially excluded communities." concludes that a new public security plan – that focuses on issues such as prevention of homicides, delivery of justice and control of small arms – is the only way to tackle violence and crime across the country.

According to Amnesty International's findings, far from reducing crime, discriminatory public security policies have concentrated criminal violence and human rights violations in Brazil's shanty towns.

"Despite the fact that people living in Brazil's poor communities are many times more likely to be victims of violent crime, Federal and State authorities invest little to nothing in their protection. The public security budget allocation has been done on the basis of repression and discrimination effectively "criminalising" poor communities as a whole," said Mr Cahill.

"The poor of Brazil's main urban centres are crying out for state protection and what they often receive, if anything, is violent and corrupt police officers. Security based on social division and repression will not bring the peace the population demands."

The lack of an effective public security policy has not only failed poor communities but the police as well. For many police officers, being sent to a favela is seen as a punishment. Police officers working in Brazil's shanty towns are often inadequately trained and resourced, while military style operations place them at high risk of attacks by criminal gangs and drug factions. In 2004 alone, 52 police officers were killed while on duty in Rio de Janeiro.

Amnesty International recognises that the federal governments have made some efforts to address the vacuum that has been public security policy, through the creation of the national public security plan and

through efforts to disarm the population. Amnesty International has also seen how at municipal level effectively targeted social investment combined with community security projects have resulted in notable reductions in levels of homicides.

“Short term political and financial objectives can no longer justify successive governments’ negligence in this area. The devastation of a generation of Brazil’s youth and the ever growing social divide that plagues Brazil must be addressed by authorities at all levels.”

For a copy of the report: “Brazil: ‘They come in Shooting’: Policing socially excluded communities.”, please see: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/ENGAMR190252005>

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>