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Brazil: Candelária and Vigário Geral 10 years on

"I believe that the police are also victims ... they discriminate against residents because they have been trained to do so ... I believe that if the government were to present a different image of these communities, I'm sure that the police would respect us, ending this discrimination."

Relative of Everson Gonçalves Silote, a 26 year old taxi driver shot and killed during a police operation in the community of Borel in Rio de Janeiro on 17 April 2003.

Today, Amnesty International launches the report "Rio de Janeiro 2003: Candelária and Vigário Geral 10 years on" which documents the prevailing sense of impunity surrounding two horrific police massacres that took place in Brazil during 1993 and reports on dramatic increases in police killings in Rio today.

"Even though there have been some successful prosecutions, particularly with regard to the Candelária killings, ten years after the massacres many of those responsible remain unpunished. Survivors, witnesses and relatives of those who died continue to suffer and to seek truth and justice." Amnesty International said.

Only two of the fifty policeman accused of involvement in the Vigário Geral massacre are in prison. None of the survivors or relatives of the victims of either massacre has yet received full compensation from the state, including Wagner dos Santos, who miraculously survived both the Candelária massacre and a further attempt on his life in December 1994.

"Evidence shows that Rio's poor communities suffer extreme levels of violence, most notably at the hands of the police. In the first six months of 2003 alone, 621 civilians were killed by Rio's police," Amnesty International stressed. The organization continued "these cases are not only international symbols of police violence including violence against children but they also illustrate many of the problems related to prosecuting human rights violations in Brazil."

Amnesty International documented consistent evidence that the context in which these killings took place had not changed. This includes statements made in public by elected officials that appear to support the killing of civilians, presenting the killings as an acceptable and necessary product of crime control. In 2001 a deputy in Rio's state legislative assembly said:

"Today with the question of human rights protection, some think that they can do what they want ... electors have to understand my position and vote for me, knowing that as for that 17-year-old who died in

Candelária, as I've said before and as I say again, if any more die, I'll pay for the coffin and reward whoever kills them".

Ten years on, Amnesty International found that any positive attempts to reform policing methods in the city have been largely abandoned.

"The organization has always recognised and deplored the fact that Rio de Janeiro and other cities in Brazil suffer from extreme levels of urban violence. However, the Brazilian authorities must fulfil their duty to uphold the law and to protect all the country's citizens from violence in all its forms. Only by doing this will the human rights of all Brazilians be protected." Amnesty International concluded.

General Information

In 1993 Brazil and the international community were appalled by two massacres of unarmed and defenceless civilians that took place within weeks of each other in Rio de Janeiro city. Eight "street children" and young adults were attacked and killed as they lay sleeping outside a church in central Rio in what became known as the Candelária massacre on 23 July 1993. Little over a month later on 29 August 1993 twenty one residents of Vigário Geral, a poor community on the city's outskirts, were slaughtered by a group of heavily armed and hooded men.

The shock of these brutal and senseless killings was made all the worse 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.

In June 2003 Amnesty International visited Rio to speak with relatives and representatives of those who died, and to reflect on the situation in the city today. The organization conducted meetings with human rights organizations, representatives of various sectors of civil society and the state authorities.

For a full copy of the report "Rio de Janeiro 2003: Candelária and Vigário Geral 10 years on" , see: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engamr190152003> (English)

[http://web.amnesty.org/aidoc/aidoc_pdf.nsf/index/AMR190152003PORTUGUESE/\\$File/AMR1901503.pdf](http://web.amnesty.org/aidoc/aidoc_pdf.nsf/index/AMR190152003PORTUGUESE/$File/AMR1901503.pdf) (Portuguese)

Music Video from Grupo Cultural Afroreggae: <http://emedia.amnesty.org/Brazilmusicvideo.ram>

Interview with a victim of police brutality in Rio de Janeiro: <http://emedia.amnesty.org/Brazil.ram>

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