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Brazil: Carandiru massacre -- Brazilian criminal justice system in the dock

As the Carandiru massacre trial opens on Wednesday, the Brazilian justice system will be once again under the spotlight of national and international scrutiny, Amnesty International said today.

The organization will be sending an observer to the trial of Colonel Ubiratan Guimarnes, who led the Military Police shock troops into the Casa da DetenHno prison (popularly known as Carandiru) on 2 October 1992, following the outbreak of a riot. He is accused of responsibility for the 111 killings which resulted from the operation.

"In the light of major juridical inconsistencies in other important massacre trials, we feel it is extremely important to have one of our representatives at the trial, to ensure that international standards are met and to report back to our members around the world, who have been following this case over the years," Amnesty International said.

*As with most major massacres in Brazil, the case has been characterised by failures and cover-ups in the criminal justice system. Moreover, the *esprit de corps* inherent in police investigations of police crimes has led to inefficiencies and willful negligence as well as destruction of evidence and the alteration of the crime scene.*

"Nine years on, the 111 victims of Carandiru and their families are still waiting for the truth to be known and for those responsible to be brought to justice," Amnesty International said, noting that Colonel Guimarnes will be the first of the Military Police personnel involved in the massacre to be brought to justice.

Eighty-four other military policemen are awaiting trial on charges of homicide, and another 21 are awaiting trial on charges of causing physical injury in connection with the massacre. Only one of the accused is currently in preventive detention.

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