

Brazil: Police violence on 500th anniversary -- new investigation needed

A new investigation is needed into the military police action of 22 April 2000 against indigenous and black groups, landless activists, and others protesting against Brazil's official 500th anniversary celebrations in Porto Seguro, Bahia state, said Amnesty International today in a new report.

On 22 April, 30 protestors were injured and over 140 temporarily detained when military police reportedly attacked peaceful protestors using tear gas, rubber bullets and baton charges. Eight months on and those responsible for the operation and the human rights violations committed remain no closer to justice.

"The authorities have not responded adequately to the strong witness and documentary evidence of unprovoked and disproportionate police force against demonstrators," said the human rights organization. "A full review of the case is essential."

In its new report, Amnesty International argues that instead of investigating and bringing to account all those responsible, and also compensating the victims, the authorities sought to portray the victims as the perpetrators. The organization also stated that the authorities justified the police action in terms of preventing disruptions to the official celebrations.

Earlier this year, a federal police investigation exonerated the military police of allegations of excessive and arbitrary use of force. However, the federal prosecutors office responsible for initiating

investigations in the case has been highly critical of the investigation, calling it inadequate and superficial, and is seeking to disprove its findings.

"The problem is that those seeking to further the investigations have faced lack of resources and overt official support for the military police officers involved - the officer in charge of the operation was promoted in recognition for his role," said Amnesty International.

"It is the responsibility of the authorities, both state and federal, to ensure that a full and fair judicial process can take place. So far, the authorities have appeared unwilling to establish such a climate, denying the victims the right to justice and redress," the organization added.

Amnesty International has documented over many years human rights violations against indigenous peoples and other minorities, including the failure of the judicial system to provide justice. The events of 22 April and the subsequent failure to effectively investigate the abuses and adequately compensate the victims, lends further weight to the claims of these groups that the judicial system discriminates against them.

Background

On 22 April 2000, the 500th anniversary of the Portuguese arrival in Brazil, the Bahia state military police reportedly used arbitrary and excessive police force in order to prevent protestors from the *Marcha Indígena 2000* and *Outros 500* campaign from reaching Porto Seguro, Bahia, where official celebrations were taking place. Photographs and witnesses appear to bear out the claims of those who participated in the protest that the police action was unprovoked.

\ENDS

public document

For a copy of the report, *Brazil: Police Violence & the 500th Anniversary* (AMR 19/29/00, December 2000) or 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>