

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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Brazil: Further criminal attacks in São Paulo

Amnesty International today condemned killings and attacks led by members of the criminal gang the PCC (*Primeiro Comando da Capital* -- or First Command of the Capital), which have shaken the state of São Paulo this week.

Since Tuesday, the PCC has reportedly orchestrated 106 attacks against buses, banks, supermarkets, police stations as well as other locations. Official reports state eight people have been killed, though media reports state that this figure may be higher.

Amnesty International said that there can be no justification for violent attacks against civilians and law-enforcement targets, and that these attacks are criminal acts that only further undermine the effective provision of human rights-based public security for all in São Paulo.

All responses to these attacks must comply with national and international law, and state and federal authorities must not allow retaliatory operations by police officers or members of suspected "death squads" -- such as those that reportedly occurred in the wake of similar PCC atrocities in May -- to take place.

The use of illegal force by the state will only further deepen the public security crisis that fuels the criminal attacks, while continuing to put poorly prepared and resourced police and prison guards at greater risk.

All candidates in the upcoming federal and state elections must avoid the temptation to play politics with this current wave of violence.

It is incumbent on municipal, state and federal authorities to work together to ensure the immediate security of all the citizens of São Paulo state from criminal attacks and from potentially retaliatory acts from law-enforcement officials.

Amnesty International urged authorities to devise short-term and long-term policies to bring to an end to the vacuum that has characterised state and national public security policy for the last three decades.

Background

The PCC is a criminal gang born in São Paulo's prison system. Ostensibly set up to fight the violence and injustice suffered by inmates, it has become a powerful criminal force in the state over the last 10 years.

The latest attacks follow a wave of violence that hit the state of São Paulo in May, when the PCC led 299 attacks in the state of São Paulo, while also initiating 82 riots in prisons in several states (see AMR 19/023/2006, 15 May 2006).

According to official reports, 42 law-enforcement officers and four civilians were killed during these attacks while 92 suspected criminals were killed in police actions. However, reports from the public defenders office, the state commission of human rights and human rights groups challenge these figures, with reports of possibly hundreds executed in retaliatory operations by the police.