

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

AI Index: AMR 19/030/2006 (Public)
News Service No: 221
24 August 2006

Brazil: Conviction in the Baixada Fluminense massacre case

“The conviction of Carlos Jorge Carvalho, military police officer in Rio de Janeiro, for his involvement in the indiscriminate killings of 29 civilians in the Baixada Fluminense area of Rio de Janeiro on 31 March 2005 is an important step in fighting impunity for human rights violators,” Amnesty International stated today.

As trials for previous massacres have shown, such convictions are an important victory for those who have been fighting for justice and the human rights of those communities least protected by the state.

Nevertheless, the conviction of low-ranking police officers alone has not been enough to stem the steady rise of police and “death-squad” related killings in the state of Rio de Janeiro.

In the meantime, the killing continues. Last year, in the face of high levels of armed violence, official statistics showed that Rio de Janeiro’s police forces killed over 1,000 civilians in situations described as “resistance followed by death”, with scant investigations into the circumstances surrounding them. These figures do not include the numbers killed by police involved in criminal or “death squad” activity.

Many serious breaches related to the investigation and procedures surrounding the Baixada Fluminense killings have mirrored concerns raised by Amnesty International during previous massacres at the hands of Rio de Janeiro’s police forces, 13 years previously. Failure to address these systemic problems have allowed for the conditions which led to the 29 killings last March.

Amnesty International has received information that police and forensic investigations were at best incomplete or poor, possibly contributing to the release, due to lack of evidence, of four of the eleven initial suspects in the Baixada Fluminense case.

Similarly, no apparent investigations have been mounted into chain of command responsibility despite initial suggestions of a link between the killings and a crackdown on ‘death squads’ and other criminal activity by military police in the Baixada Fluminense.

So, once again, no senior officers or members of the state government are deemed responsible for the consistent use of excessive force or criminal violence by elements within Rio de Janeiro’s police forces.

At the same time, one year and five months after the killings family members, are still awaiting promised compensation from the state.

Time and again, violent and repressive policing has proved not to provide effective security, especially in the poorest communities which bear the brunt of criminal and police violence. It is time for the authorities to end all the killings, by providing the profound reforms to the public security system which will end the use of

violent and ineffective policing and address the underlying social problems that sustain them.

Background

The killing of 29 civilians at the Baixada Fluminense followed 12 years after the massacres of Candelaria and Vigario Geral which sent shockwaves around the world. Yet, today those who lost loved ones in the killings of nine street children outside Rio de Janeiro's main cathedral, in Candelaria square, by military police and the killing of 21 residents of Vigario Geral by members of a police "death squad", continue to fight for justice.