

PUBLIC

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UA 70/98 Fear for safety/Ill-treatment in detention/  
Medical concern

5 March 1998

**BRAZIL Prisoners in Paulo Sarasate Prison, Fortaleza, Ceara state**

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Fears for the safety of 800 common prisoners in Paulo Sarasate Maximum Security Prison (IPPS) in Fortaleza, the capital of Ceara state, are growing following the 1 March 1998 occupation of the prison by 600 military police.

Accompanied by dogs, the *Batalhão de Choque*, a riot police force, and divisions of the *Grupo de Ações Táticas Especiais*, Special Tactical Actions Group, occupied the IPPS, claiming inmates were plotting to blow up part of the prison and break out en masse. Prisoners were reportedly beaten and injured. Ten are now believed to be held incommunicado, as well as being denied medical care and examination of their injuries.

The current situation inside the prison is thought to be very tense, and another rebellion is considered imminent. Amnesty International fears that the military police may resort to using excessive force and ill-treat prisoners in response, as documented by the organisation in several previous cases.

The Maria Nilva Alves Foundation, a local human rights group which carries out welfare work with prisoners, has reportedly received a petition signed by 600 IPPS inmates, stating that they were beaten and ill-treated by the military police during the occupation, and that a number of prisoners suffered broken ribs and arms and were bitten by police dogs.

Human rights groups, representatives of the criminal justice system and state prosecution were not informed about the occupation, or permitted to enter the prison. Medical supplies are not being allowed in. The prison authorities have refused to allow medical examinations of prisoners injured during the occupation, without which a civil police inquiry cannot be opened. Although the bulk of the military police have withdrawn, up to 300 reportedly remain inside the prison, performing the daily security duties normally carried out by prison guards.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The IPPS prison authorities have denied access to local human rights groups since the New Year, following an incident when military police allegedly killed six escaped prisoners. On 24 December a group of prisoners took four people hostage and escaped. According to a Civil Police inquiry and the testimony of two of the hostages, the prisoners were shot after surrendering to the military police.

The Brazilian Constitution allows military police to ensure the external security of prisons, and to intervene to quash rebellions, while internal security is the responsibility of prison service guards. However, due to a shortage of guards, military police are now guarding prisoners inside the jail. This is common in Brazil's understaffed and extremely overcrowded prisons. As a result, rebellions, hostage-taking and attempted escapes are regular occurrences.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in Portuguese or your own language:**

- expressing concern at the current situation in the Paulo Sarasate Maximum Security Prison and calling on the authorities to take steps to ensure that the military police act in accordance with the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials;

- expressing concern at the alleged beating and ill-treatment of prisoners in the Paulo Sarasate prison in Fortaleza during the occupation by military police on 1 March 1998;
- calling on the authorities to carry out an immediate, full and impartial investigation into these allegations;
- expressing concern that access continues to be denied to the prisoners' lawyers, human rights groups and the State Prosecution Service;
- calling on the prison authorities to permit access to all of the above, and to the Civil Police, so that medical examinations of those injured may be conducted, and to permit the prisoners access to medical treatment.

**APPEALS TO:**

Public Security Secretary, Ceará

Exmo. Sr. Secretário de Segurança Pública do Estado de Ceará  
Gral. Candido Vargas, Secretaria de Segurança Pública  
Rua do Rosário 199, 3ºAndar, Centro, Fortaleza CE, 60055-090 Brazil

**Telegrams: Secretaria Seguranca Publica, Fortaleza, Ceara, Brazil**

**Faxes: +55 85 224 8001 (if voice, ask for fax)**

**Salutation: Sr. Secretário / Dear Secretary**

Attorney General, Ceará

Procurador Geral do Estado de Ceará, Dr. Nicéforo Fernandes  
Av. Santos Dumont 1687, 9º andar  
Fortaleza CE, 60150-000 Brazil

**Telegrams: Procurador Geral, Fortaleza, Ceara, Brazil**

**Faxes: +55 85 268 3089 (if voice, ask for fax)**

**Salutation: Vossa Excelência/ Your Excellency**

Secretary of Justice, Ceará

Exmo. Secretário de Justiça do Estado de Ceará, Paulo Duarte  
Secretaria de Justiça  
Av. Heráclito Graça 411, 4ºAndar, Sala 411  
Fortaleza, CE, 60140-010, Brazil

**Telegrams: Secretaria Justiça, Fortaleza, Ceara, Brazil**

**Faxes: + 55 85 226 4142**

**Salutation: Sr. Secretário / Dear Secretary**

**COPIES TO:**

Ceará Human Rights Commission

Comissão de Direitos Humanos e Cidadania da Assembléia Legislativa  
do Estado do Ceará  
Av. Desembargador Moreira 2807, Gab. 513, Fortaleza - CE, 60-170.002 Brazil

**Faxes: +55 85 277 2564 (if voice, ask for fax)**

Secretary, Human Rights Secretariat

Exmo Sr. Secretário dos Direitos Humanos, Dr. José Gregori  
Secretaria Nacional dos Direitos Humanos  
Ministério da Justiça  
Esplanada dos Ministérios  
Bloco T, Anexo II, 2 Andar  
Brasília DF, CEP 70064-900

**Faxes: +55 61 225 0440 (if voice, ask for fax)**

and to diplomatic representatives of Brazil accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 16 April 1998.