

Around 20 detainees held in the Urso Branco prison, Porto Velho, Rondonia state are reportedly in danger of being killed by other inmates. Most of those in danger are recently transferred detainees being housed in holding cells (*seguro*), which are used for inmates deemed to be at risk from others. Continued negligence from state authorities has led to extreme overcrowding, and prisoners of different categories being held together.

Due to overcrowding, detainees held in the main part of the prison were transferred to holding cells in June. On their arrival, two were reportedly attacked with boiling water by prisoners and guards. This led to fights between the inmates. Prisoners have been attempting to break down the cell walls and attack those in neighbouring cells.

On 5 July, another 34 detainees were transferred from the central police station in the state capital, Porto Velho, to the holding cells. As a result, the level of violence among those inside the cells has increased. Nine detainees awaiting transfer from the prison have been moved to a triage cell in the infirmary, as they feared their lives were in danger.

The prison has proved to be effectively out of control with an extreme history of violence. On 1 January, a prison transfer from the holding cells to the main prison, by judicial order, saw 27 inmates massacred by other prisoners. Military police and prison guards, who could hear the screams of those being killed, refused to enter the prison to intervene. Since the massacre, a further 10 detainees have been killed by guards and other prisoners.

Conditions in the prison have been so terrible that the Inter-American Commission issued preventive measures on 14 March, for the government to implement in order to ensure the security of inmates. On 25 June, the Inter-American Court, whose rulings are binding, issued further preventive measures for the authorities to implement. This is the first time Brazil has been taken to the Inter-American Court. Amnesty International has learned that a delegation from the Federal government did recently visit the state but failed to enter the prison.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

An Amnesty International delegation visited the Urso Branco prison in April 2002. They found extremely poor conditions which failed to reach minimum health and sanitary requirements. Poorly trained and underpaid guards have been unable to control detainees. The authorities' response has been to fill the prison with heavily armed, underprepared military police, which while also illegal has not controlled the level of violence in the prison. Amnesty International found several detainees with shotgun and rubber bullet wounds, and has received reports of at least one detainee being killed by a police rubber bullet.

Overcrowding in the prison is extreme. It was built for 350 detainees but now officially holds 867. According to unofficial figures there could be well over 900 inmates at Urso Branco prison. In addition, the poorly-built prison building has allowed detainees to break cell walls and move freely between cells. This has made it impossible to control the movement of prisoners.

#### **RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Portuguese, English or your own language:**

- calling on the authorities to guarantee the immediate security of all detainees held in the holding cells (*seguro*) of the Urso Branco prison, Porto Velho, Rondonia state,
- urging the authorities to guarantee the security of nine detainees held in a triage cell in the infirmary by implementing the transfers they have been waiting for;
- calling for the authorities to ensure that all prisoners are properly segregated according to category;
- calling on the authorities to immediately implement all preventive measures made by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights to ensure the security of all detainees held in Urso Branco prison;
- reminding the authorities of their need to ensure that all military police and prison guards are properly trained in minimum use of force, and are provided with conditions to perform their duties with safety to both detainees and themselves.

#### **APPEALS TO:**

Federal Secretary for Human Rights

Sr. Paulo Sergio Pinheiro

Secretaria de Estado dos Direitos Humanos

Ministério da Justiça

Esplanada dos Ministérios,

Bloco T, 4º andar, Sala 420

70064-900 Brasília - DF, Brazil

**Telegrams:       Secretário de Estado dos Direitos Humanos, Brasília - DF, Brazil**

**Fax:               + 55 61 226 7980**

**Salutation: Exmo. Sr, Secretário/Dear Federal Secretary**

State Secretary of Public Security, Defense and Citizenship

Secretário de Segurança Pública, Defesa e Cidadania

Col Valnir Ferro de Souza

Rua Gonçalves Dias, 802

Bairro Aleria

78900-000, Porto Velho - RO, Brazil

**Telegrams:       Secretário de Segurança Pública, Defesa e Cidadania, Porto Velho - RO, Brazil**

**Fax:               + 55 69 216 8913 (if someone answers, say 'Me da tom de fax por favor')**

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

**COPIES TO:**

Comissão Justiça e Paz

Arquidiocese de Porto Velho

Rua Carlos Gomes, 964

Centro

78900-030, Porto Velho - RO, Brazil

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 22 August 2002.