

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Brazil: More violence, human rights violations and intimidation in Espírito Santo**

The explosion of a bomb last night in the offices of the Brazilian lawyer's association in Vitória, the capital of Espírito Santo state, demonstrates once again the lengths to which elements involved in organised crime are prepared to go in order to intimidate their opponents, Amnesty International said today.

"It seems as if the recent decision by the Federal Attorney General not to recommend federal intervention in the state has been taken as a tacit sign of approval by criminal groups active in the state with the support of the local police, who have now stepped up their campaign of terror and intimidation against those who oppose them," the organization added.

"It is now up to the recently established task force to carry out thorough, impartial investigations into this incident as well as the widespread pattern of human rights violations, threats and intimidation which affects Espírito Santo."

The situation in the state is so serious, especially with regards to the intimidation and harassment of human rights defenders, that the final declaration at the second international consultation for human rights defenders in the Americas -- which took place in Guatemala this week -- made special reference to the dangers faced by human rights defenders in Espírito Santo.

Amnesty International has long publicised reported links between the police association Scuderie Detetive le Coq (SDLC), human rights violations and organised crime in the state. In a statement issued yesterday, Amnesty International called for the newly established task force to carry out a thorough investigation of long-standing human rights abuse, organised crime and corruption, and to ensure that those responsible are finally brought to justice.

"Only thus can the cycle of violence, human rights violations and impunity that is so entrenched in Espírito Santo come to an end," Amnesty International said.

### **Background**

At the time of the explosion, a ceremony recognising new members of the association was taking place. Dr Agisandro Pereira, the president of the association, and 130 other lawyers and functionaries were in the building. Amnesty International is seriously concerned for their safety, and for human rights defenders in Espírito Santo, who receive constant death threats.

Earlier this month the federal Ministry of Justice's Human Rights Council recommended full

federal intervention in Espírito Santo. Amnesty International welcomed this as a crucial step in the battle against organised crime, human rights violations and impunity in Brazil (<http://web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/Index/AMR190092002>).

However the decision to go ahead with this was withheld by the Federal Attorney General following a meeting with president Fernando Henrique Cardoso. Amnesty International expressed its concern that the decision of the Federal Attorney General was directly influenced by political and electoral considerations, as no apparent judicial reasons for the decision have been made public (<http://web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/Index/AMR190102002>). The Minister of Justice, the head of the Federal police and numerous other federal officials resigned in protest at this decision. Instead of full federal intervention, the new Minister of Justice is sending a special investigative task force to the state. The task force, which is made up mainly of federal police officers, the first members of which have already travelled to Espírito Santo, is mandated to investigate organised crime and protect those at risk.

Please also see Brazil: Espírito Santo -- Lives on the line, no more empty promises, <http://web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/recent/AMR190142002>

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