

**BRAZIL Elizabeth Cristina de Oliveira Maia(f)
Survivors and relatives of victims of police death squad killings in Rio de
Janeiro**

Elizabeth Cristina de Oliveira Maia, who survived a military police massacre of street children in 1993, was shot dead outside her home on 26 September. She had braved threats to testify against those who carried out the massacre, and was due to give evidence at a hearing in October.

Amnesty International is concerned that her murder is intended to intimidate witnesses in other high-profile human rights trials, and that the prosecution of police officers in other trials may be undermined. The killing demonstrates that the authorities are unable or unwilling to protect key witnesses. Police officers are currently on trial for the murder of 21 residents of the Vigario Geral *favela* (shanty town) in 1993, and the prosecution is dependent on witness testimony.

Elizabeth Cristina de Oliveira Maia was shot in the head repeatedly by a hooded gunman, outside her home in the Botafogo neighbourhood of Rio de Janeiro. She leaves three young children. She had survived the 1993 massacre outside Candelária church, in which military police killed eight street children. Of 72 children who were present when the massacre took place, 44 have since died violent deaths.

The Rio de Janeiro police reportedly at first acknowledged that she could have been murdered by a death squad. Police death squad activity in Rio de Janeiro, such as the Candelária massacre, has long been documented by Amnesty International. However, the authorities later claimed that the killing was drugs-related. There is concern that this may be an excuse to avoid conducting a thorough and effective investigation into the killing, since police officers may be implicated.

Police death squads have terrorised street children and the marginalized of Rio de Janeiro for many years. Elizabeth Cristina de Oliveira Maia's courage in testifying against police officers involved in the Candelária massacre was a symbol of defiance in the face of this constant threat. Her murder graphically demonstrates how exposed witnesses to such crimes are, and is a direct threat to all those who dare to come forward to give evidence against police.

Elizabeth's murder appears to demonstrate the continuing impunity with which death squads can act in Rio de Janeiro, leaving many of the survivors and relatives of victims of Candelária and Vigario Geral, among others, aware that they may be targeted at any time.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In the summer of 1993 Brazil was shocked by two horrific massacres carried out by military police in Rio de Janeiro, at Candelária (see UA 241/93, AMR 19/22/93, 26 July 1993) and Vigario Geral. Despite campaigns by human rights and other organizations, the children who witnessed the Candelária killings were never given adequate protection, and one adult witness had to leave the country for his own safety. Their statements to the initial inquiry were also largely ignored. Four separate trials resulted in three military policemen being sentenced to long prison terms. Three others, including one civilian, were acquitted.

Both the Vigarario Geral and Candelária cases have been presented to the Inter-American Commission (CIDH) on Human Rights. Despite the trial and some convictions of military policemen in these cases, there remains serious concern at the manner and effectiveness of the investigations and the continuing failure of the federal and state authorities to seriously tackle police death squads in the state.

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

- expressing concern at the killing of Elizabeth Cristina de Oliveira Maia on 26 September;
- expressing concern for the safety of other witnesses and the relatives of victims of police death squad killings in Rio de Janeiro;
- asking the authorities to take immediate steps to properly fund and support a witness protection program capable protecting those at risk;
- calling for a swift, impartial and effective investigation of the killing of Elizabeth Cristina de Oliveira Maia, which will examine the possible involvement of police officers, for the results to be made public and for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- calling for the federal authorities to intervene and take immediate steps to combat the continuing activities of police death squads in Rio de Janeiro.

APPEALS TO:

Governor of Rio de Janeiro State
Governador do Estado de Rio de Janeiro
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Telegrams: Governador Rio de Janeiro, Brasil
Fax: + 55 21 553 6247/553 6162
Salutation: Vossa Excelência/Your excellency

State Secretary for Public Security
Secretário de Segurança Pública do Estado de Rio de Janeiro
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Fax: + 55 21 399 1008
Telegrams: Secretário de Segurança Pública, Rio de Janeiro, Brasil
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Minister of Justice
Ministro da Justiça do Brasil
Dr. José Gregori
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Salutation: Vossa Excelência/Your Excellency
Fax: + 55 61 224 2448/322 6817

COPIES TO:

Centro Brasileiro de Defesa do Direito da Criança e do Adolescente (CBDDCA)
13 Maio No 33, Sala 3107
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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 14 November 2000.