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BRAZIL: KEY WITNESS TO CANDELARIA MASSACRE SHOT IN RIO DE JANEIRO

Last week's shooting of a key witness to the killings of eight street children outside the Candelária church in Rio de Janeiro last year reinforces the need for a serious witness protection program in Brazil, according to Amnesty International.

"We have urged the authorities time and again to protect all the witnesses to the Candelária massacre, but up to 40 of them are still sleeping on the streets where anyone can attack them," Amnesty International said.

According to reports received by the organization in July, these children have been the target of death and bombs threats allegedly by members of the military police. Amnesty International has repeatedly submitted the names of these children to the Rio de Janeiro authorities, but has received no response.

On 9 December, twenty-three-year-old Wagner dos Santos -- a key witness who had identified three military police standing trial for the Candelária massacre -- was shot and seriously wounded in Rio de Janeiro, despite being under state protection. After regaining consciousness, Wagner reportedly told the authorities that his attackers were plain clothes policemen who told him they were shooting him for having identified their colleagues.

A national and international outcry followed the killings of seven children and one youth, part of a larger group of about 50 street children, as they slept rough outside the Candelária church in downtown Rio de Janeiro on 23 July 1993. Based mainly on Wagner dos Santos' testimony, three military police officers were charged and are awaiting trial for the killings, which have become known as the 'Candelaria Massacre'.

"Wagner dos Santos was one of the few survivors of the massacre under police protection. The fact that such an attack could still take place shows that his protection was inadequate and we continue to be deeply concerned for his safety," Amnesty International said.

The human rights organization will be calling on the new government, which takes office on 1 January, to set up a witness protection program immediately.

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NIGERIA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL DELEGATION STYMIED IN ITS MISSION

ABUJA, NIGERIA -- Following government criticism of Amnesty International's human rights investigation in Nigeria, the organization's delegates in the country complained of being blocked in their attempts to talk with opposition leader Moshood Abiola and other political prisoners.

"We have been frustrated in our attempts to visit prisoners of conscience and other political detainees," said the head of the delegation, Tiébilé Dramé, a former Minister of Foreign Affairs in Mali and until recently an official of the United Nations Civilian Mission monitoring human rights in Haiti.

"The government's lack of transparency about these detainees increases our concern, especially for those held incommunicado for months," said Mr Dramé.

In a meeting yesterday with the delegation, covered by the local press, Alhaji Aminu Saleh, Secretary to the Government of the Federation, denied that there were prisoners of conscience in Nigeria and suggested that those detained were terrorists or economic saboteurs.

The three-person delegation has been in Nigeria since 8 December. They have held talks with various officials, including members of the Federal Government. However, the authorities have failed to allow them access to detained trade unionists, leading members of the Ogoni ethnic group, pro-democracy activists and Moshood Abiola, who have been adopted Amnesty International as prisoners of conscience.

FOR FURTHER INTERVIEWS WITH THE AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL DELEGATION IN NIGERIA, TELEPHONE ON THURSDAY NIGHT ONLY TO TIEBILE DRAME AT 234-9523-0225 OR OTHER EXTENSIONS -0226 THROUGH -0244.

FOR MORE INFORMATION AFTER THURSDAY NIGHT ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN NIGERIA, CONTACT THE AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS OFFICE AT 071-413-5810.