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Brazil prison massacre verdict a 'vital' step towards justice

The conviction of 23 Brazilian police officers for killing inmates in a prison massacre two decades ago is a "vital" step towards justice, Amnesty International has said.

The officers were sentenced yesterday to 156 years each in jail for their role in the deaths of 13 inmates during bloody riots at São Paulo's Carandiru prison in 1992, in which more than 100 inmates died.

"The victims, their families and survivors of this brutal, shocking crime have waited 20 years for justice," said Atila Roque, Director of Amnesty International in Brazil.

"This vital, if long overdue, ruling will hopefully kickstart a process that brings all those responsible for the killings to justice, including those in command."

The Carandiru case has become emblematic of the flaws in São Paulo's criminal justice system and its inability to deal with human rights violations.

The authorities have failed to investigate the role of senior state government officials, while the conviction of the military operation's commanding officer Colonel Ubiratan Guimarães was controversially overturned in 2006.

Military police shock troops were sent into Carandiru when a fight among prisoners, who had seized control of the jail's Block 9, escalated into a riot on 2 October 1992.

Within days of the massacre, an Amnesty International team visited the prison to gather evidence, which was used to compile a unique record of what had occurred in each of the cells in Block 9.

They were also able to evaluate forensic evidence and document the inadequate handling of ballistics evidence, which amounted to an attempted cover-up by officials.

The report [Brazil: "Death has arrived"](#) found that São Paulo's Governor and Secretary of Public Security abdicated their responsibilities by handing complete control of the prison to the military police and were therefore also responsible for what happened.

Dozens more police officers are expected to be brought to trial in connection with the Carandiru case in the coming months, but no senior government figures are set to be held accountable.

Meanwhile, lawyers for the convicted police officers have said they will appeal against this weekend's verdicts.

"With this verdict, the São Paulo judicial system has at last recognised the culpability of individual police officers for the killings that occurred in Carandiru," said Atila Roque.

"However, these officers did not act alone. It is now essential that those responsible for the actions of the police that day also face justice.