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Brazil: Reinforcing the International Campaign against Rio de Janeiro's *Milícias*

Today's news that Rio de Janeiro state Deputy Marcelo Freixo will be invited to speak in Europe on the spread of *milícias*, by Front Line Defenders and Amnesty International, is part of a longstanding international campaign.

Human rights activists around the world continue to campaign against the spread of Rio de Janeiro's *milícias*, organized criminal gangs made up largely of former or off-duty state law-enforcement agents.

These gangs dominate the lives of hundreds of thousands of residents of Rio's most vulnerable communities, extorting money, building irregular and illegal businesses, spreading violence and creating political fiefdoms. As such essential political actions must be taken, in conjunction with police investigations, to quell the *milícias*. These should include combating the irregular and illegal economic activities that sustain them.

The men and women who have bravely stood up to these criminal gangs often live in extreme danger, as was recently shown by the killing of judge Patrícia Acioli by members of Rio de Janeiro's military police.

For some years state Deputy Marcelo Freixo, a long time human rights activist, has been one of the main public faces of the fight against the *milícias*. Freixo, president of the parliamentary state commission of human rights, presided over a parliamentary commission of inquiry into the activities of the gangs, leading to hundreds of detentions. As a consequence he has suffered numerous threats to his life.

The deputy has long collaborated with the international campaign to inform the world and denounce the spread of these groups. To this end Front Line Defenders and Amnesty International have invited Marcelo Freixo to Europe to support the campaign and meet with authorities and human rights activists to lobby for greater international support.

Marcelo Freixo has recently received seven new death threats. These threats underline the extreme danger he is under, and place immense stress on both him and his family. Front Line Defenders and Amnesty recognize that the state authorities have consistently provided the state deputy with armed protection and that this protection is being reinforced at this time, and that hundreds of arrests have been made. However, it is time for the federal, state and municipal authorities to implement the outstanding recommendations of the Parliamentary Inquiry to ensure that all citizens of Rio de Janeiro can live in greater peace and security.