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BRAZIL: HUMAN RIGHTS PROGRAM UNDERMINED BY SENATE VOTE

Amnesty International welcomed today the launch of a comprehensive program to increase human rights protection and promotion in Brazil but questioned whether the government would make the implementation of the program a high priority.

“Last week’s vote in the Brazilian Senate thwarting legislation to transfer jurisdiction for military police crimes to civilian courts strikes at the heart of the reforms,” the human rights organization said.

“The government failed to secure the support of its own congressional allies for such a fundamental element of the human rights program. Unfortunately, this speaks louder than its declarations of outrage in relation to the recent massacre of landless peasants in Pará, and the fanfare for the launch of the Human Rights Program.”

Flagrant obstructions in the investigation of the 17 April massacre of 19 peasants in Eldorado dos Carajas, Pará State, demonstrated how urgent the reforms are. These reforms should include:

- federal investigation of certain human rights crimes;
- the inclusion of torture as a crime in the penal code;
- a witness protection program;
- an independent forensic service; and
- independent investigation and civilian trials of military police crimes.

President Fernando Henrique Cardoso eloquently backed the program and civil society is poised to monitor its implementation. Amnesty International therefore urges the Government and congress to seize the moment and ensure that the reforms are passed promptly.

“Only then can confidence be restored that the Program will be a working instrument to curb impunity rather than just a wish-list,” the human rights organization said.

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