

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: AMR 19/031/2006 (Public)
News Service No: 230
5 September 2006

Brazil: Video message to Presidential and Governmental candidates -- a wake-up call

In a video made public today, Amnesty International brought the suffering and fears of Brazil's most deprived to the attention of the country's Presidential and Governmental candidates.

The video, which has been sent to Presidential and Governmental candidates, includes footage and testimonies of living conditions and police operations in Brazil's poorer areas. It also includes a call from Amnesty International's Secretary General Irene Khan for Brazil's candidates to tackle the country's security crisis. In particular, Irene Khan urged candidates to develop human rights based public security policies, promote a Code of Conduct for public security forces and establish tougher measures to regulate the flow of small arms.

"Brazil's public security crisis is the country's most pressing issue. The message emerging from Brazil's poor and rich communities is loud and clear: ensuring effective public security is the only way to create real human security and allow all in Brazil to live with freedom from fear and from want," said Irene Khan.

"This is a wake-up call for Presidential and Governmental candidates across Brazil. The discriminatory posture of consecutive governments towards the most vulnerable communities has historically criminalized poverty and currently endangers hundreds of thousands of lives. It is time to ask why things have gone wrong for so long."

According to Brazil's Ministry of Health 36,000 people were killed with guns across Brazil during 2004. Most of them were living in poor areas with reduced police presence.

"Poverty, violence and the proliferation of small arms -- daily realities for millions of Brazilians, are creating and sustaining environments where human rights abuses are flourishing."

Amnesty International has, for decades, documented how consecutive governments in Brazil have resorted to the public security forces to deal with the symptoms of state neglect. Such policies have resulted in poor communities across the country sinking deeper into violence and police officers ending up as both the perpetrators and the victims of violence.

"Violence and social exclusion are two sides of the same coin. The policy of containing violence within Brazil's favelas is not only leading to human rights abuses, but it is clearly not working. Genuine security cannot be achieved by defending the rights of some at the expense of the rights of others," said Irene Khan.

Brazil's institutional failure runs through the entire criminal justice system. The overcrowded and poorly resourced prison system is reinforcing gang culture with its policy of requiring

inmates to choose between factions on entry. Corruption within the police and political classes has generated a climate of lawlessness in which organised crime has flourished.

For a copy of Amnesty International's Open Letter to Brazil's Presidential and Governmental candidates or to download Irene Khan's video message to Brazil's Presidential and Governmental candidates, please see:

<http://web.amnesty.org/pages/bra-050906-action-eng>

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