

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## Public Statement

AI Index: AMR 19/038/2006 (Public)  
News Service No: 331  
29 December 2006

### **Brazil: An alarm call to the new government – the ever growing public security crisis**

Amnesty International totally and unreservedly condemns the criminal attacks which took place over the last two nights in Rio de Janeiro state. Early reports attribute these attacks as a response to the rise of “militias”, reportedly made up of active or former police officers, reinforcing the message that the failure of effective efforts by the state and federal authorities to address the public security crisis has only added fuel to the growing violence.

On afternoon of the 28 December going into the morning of 29 December criminal gangs mounted a series of attacks across the city of Rio de Janeiro and in a number of municipalities in the interior of the state. Several police stations were shot at and bombed with home made devices, while a number of buses were burnt, including one in which seven passengers were killed.

The attacks reportedly resulted, at time of writing, in 19 people killed and 22 injured, including women and children as well as police officers and criminal suspects.

Amnesty International calls on the state authorities to fully investigate the attacks and to bring those responsible to justice in accordance with the law and without recourse to further human rights violations.

In May, in the wake of criminal attacks in the state of São Paulo, Amnesty International asked how many men, including law-enforcement officers, as well as women and children had to die before the state and federal authorities began to seriously address the profound and systemic problems in the criminal justice system.

It appears that in the aftermath of the presidential and state elections little has been done to discuss this problem let alone address it.

The recent attacks have coincided with the end of Governor Rosinha Garotinho’s term in office. It will be a time remembered largely for the state’s descent into deeper levels of violence and the loss of countless young lives, including police officers, criminal suspects and innocent bystanders.

In the face of this violence the state and federal governments have offered little in terms of effective security to its citizens, especially the poorest who enjoy the least protection from the state. During this time policing in Rio de Janeiro has been symbolized by two things, namely: the dramatic rise in the number of “acts of resistance”, as incidents of killings by police offices are officially registered; and the introduction of the large armored car, commonly known as the “caveirão”, to police the city’s shanty towns, symptomatic of the increasingly militaristic approach adopted by the authorities to contain criminality in the city’s poorest areas.

The increasing dependence on repressive and abusive policing have in turn been responsible for two other serious problems, exemplifying the breakdown in law and order. Firstly, corruption, as exemplified by the recent investigations by federal police against over 70 members of the state police, including one of the heads of the state police force, for involvement with criminal gangs.

Secondly, the recent reports of the rise of "militias", which according to official reports, and extensive newspaper coverage, have filled the vacuum left by the state expelling drug factions from *favelas* and imposing their own form of law, reportedly on the imposition of violence and extortion.

The attacks today stand as an alarm call to the incoming state government and to the newly re-elected federal government. No more lives can be lost to short-term, politically motivated responses. Amnesty International reiterates it's call for all levels of government to collaborate to end the blood-shed.