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Brazil: Human rights defenders at risk for speaking out against abuses

Defending human rights in Brazil can be a life-threatening undertaking according to a new Amnesty International report launched in Brazil's Northeastern Ceará state today.

"If you stand up against human rights violations in Brazil, you and your family are likely to be threatened and intimidated," Amnesty International says. "Some people have even paid for their commitment with their lives."

The report, *Brazil: Human Rights Defenders: Protecting human rights for everyone* details a number of cases where people have suffered assassination attempts, threats, harassment and killings. It calls on the Brazilian government to do more to support and protect human rights defenders, and to speed up the introduction of reforms that would reduce human rights violations.

In this, the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Amnesty International is putting the spotlight on the individuals who work to defend the Declaration's principles. Human rights defenders in Brazil come from many walks of life and usually act on behalf of the most marginalized in Brazilian society such as *favelados* (shanty town residents), indigenous groups, common prisoners and street children.

Human rights defenders include members of human rights organizations, or those who have become involved in exposing human rights violations through their work as journalists, lawyers, judges or police investigators. Or they may simply have witnessed one of the many acts of violence carried out by members of Brazil's police forces.

"The cases outlined in this report are just the tip of the iceberg," the organization said. "We know of many more, and an even greater number may never be reported."

Among the cases included are those of:

- journalist Mariza Romão, a TV reporter covering a landless peasant demonstration near Eldorado de Carajás when 19 people were massacred by military police;
- Sebastião Luiz Paulino, a rural worker, who exposed the slave conditions under which 220 workers were being kept on a remote ranch in the Amazon;
- Gilson Nogueira, a lawyer shot dead on his doorstep after untiring attempts to unmask a death squad with links to the Rio Grande do Norte state government.

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Amnesty International has frequently acknowledged commitments and initiatives by Brazil's federal government towards upholding human rights. At the same time, the organization notes that there is a wide gap between the government's objectives and the situation on the ground, and that it is the courageous and risky work of human rights defenders that bridges this gap.
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For further information or to request a copy of the report, please contact Amnesty International's Press Office in London on +44 171 4135562.