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Brazil: Faces behind the statistics - report challenges long standing impunity in Rio

The report launched today by the Rede de Comunidades e Movimentos Contra a Violência (the network of communities and movements against violence) clearly shows how Rio de Janeiro's longstanding public security strategy based on a policy of shoot first and no questions asked has been underpinned by the official mechanisms which have allowed cover-up and impunity.

Behind the ever growing number of police killings registered as 'acts of resistance', and consistently promoted by the authorities as evidence of the success of their public security policies, are individual cases, people, who have been arbitrarily killed, extra-judicially executed or died as a consequence of a deliberate policy of unlawful killings.

The Rede, and especially mothers, sisters, and wives of victims who make up much of it, have shown enormous courage in challenging the forces that uphold the systematic human rights violations that make up public security policy across the state of Rio de Janeiro. They have placed faces and names to the anonymous statistics, belying the hollow rhetoric of the state government which has promoted military style incursions as the solution to maintaining public order and human rights.

The report highlights how the judiciary have failed to guarantee access to justice to the families of the victims of police violence. At the same time it makes clear that relatives and witnesses alike are abandoned to the threat of attack or retaliation by the very people accused of having committed the human rights violations they denounce.

Time and again witnesses and relatives are forced to live in fear following threats from police officers released from preventive detention. Many are forced to move from their homes to protect their safety. Others withdraw from cases. Others continue to fight for justice in the face of extreme danger to themselves.

From the killing of Edimeia da Silva in 1993, a mother fighting for justice for her child who had been forcibly disappeared to the recent killing of three boys in the community of Morro da Providencia on 14 June 2008, , the report sets out how time and again victims are being denied full access to justice.

This report and the voices of the men and women, human rights defenders all, who make up the Rede, stand as a ringing denunciation of the repressive and discriminatory policy of public security persistently promoted by the state governmentand the failure of all elements of the state, including the judicial authorities to challenge this.

It is time that all Cariocas are given rights to live without fear of criminals but equally those elements of the state puportedly their to protect their human rights. It is time that all Cariocas be given full access to justice and that those who fight for justice and human rights can do so with dignity and without fear.

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