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Brazil: Courage and dedication ensure historic victory against *milícias* in Rio de Janeiro

The conviction, last Tuesday, of ten members of the illegal para-policing groups, known as *milícias*, which are spreading through *favelas* across Rio de Janeiro, stands as an emblematic victory in the fight for human rights in the state.

In the face of death threats and intimidation a number of judges, prosecutors, police officers and state deputies have displayed courage and an admirable sense of professionalism. Their work sets the standard in the fight against organised crime, state corruption and human rights violations in Brazil.

The ten convicted included a former state deputy and a former town councillor, brothers, who were both sentenced to ten and half years for the formation of armed criminal gangs. One former police officer was sentenced in absentia, following his escape from detention through the front door of Bangu 8 prison late 2008.

At the same time, Ministry of Justice's Council for the Protection of the Person, (CDDPH), a joint federal government civil society body, announced that it would call on the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights to hold hearings on the spread of the *milícias*.

It is essential that federal and state authorities work together now to build on this landmark case, implementing recommendations set out by last year's parliamentary inquiry into the *milícias*. Similarly they should guarantee the security of those combating the spread of *milícias* and ensure that those bodies are provided with the necessary resources to guarantee the success of their tasks.

Background Information

The *milícias* consist of off-duty police officers, prison guards and firemen who have ousted drug dealers from *favelas* and now control communities with violence, while extorting money for the provision of security, as well as gas, transport, cable TV and other services. They are accused of wielding political power by guaranteeing, through intimidation, votes for certain state deputies (politicians). Although they have existed in Rio de Janeiro for some time, their sudden expansion dates back to December 2006, when over 100 *favelas* were invaded by *milicia* groups.

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