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Brazil: Nine years of missed opportunities for human rights

(Geneva) Amnesty International today published a briefing expressing serious concern at the continued high levels of killings by police officers, widespread use of torture and ill-treatment as well as attacks against human rights defenders in Brazil.

The briefing was submitted to the United Nations Human Rights Committee (HRC) prior to the Committee's consideration of Brazil's second periodic report on the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in the country.

Almost a decade on from the presentation of Brazil's first report to the HRC, the Committee will begin tomorrow with another review of the provision of civil and political rights in the country. In its briefing Amnesty International lamented the failure of Brazilian authorities to ensure the protection of fundamental human rights of all the population since 1996.

"The "turning point" offered by the creation of a National Human Rights Plan, in 1996, has not resulted in the necessary reforms to ensure that Brazilians no longer suffer torture, threats and killings at the hands of those meant to protect them," said Tim Cahill, Amnesty International researcher on Brazil.

"Successive governments have consigned human rights to the back-seat of government policy. The lack of investment of political will and financial resources in the protection of human rights continues to decimate the lives of hundreds of thousands of Brazilians."

According to Amnesty International, while advances have been made by the Brazilian authorities in some areas, these have not enjoyed the sustained support to produce concrete improvements on the ground.

Although a Torture law was introduced in 1997, only a limited number of persons have been prosecuted under the legislation and torture by state agents remains widespread and systematic. The majority of cases continue largely unreported, uninvestigated and unpunished, while victims continue to be from the most vulnerable sectors of society, mainly poor, young black or mixed race males who are criminal suspects.

Human rights defenders across Brazil have suffered death threats, intimidation, defamation suits, and killings. Until recently, state and federal authorities have either shown reluctance or an inability to

provide measures to ensure the suitable and effective protection of those under threat.

The Programme for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, launched by the federal government last year, has made a notable contribution to promotion of the work of those fighting for human rights in Brazil and across the region. However, the programme continues to lack the necessary infrastructure for its effective implementation.

Background Information

Having ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) Brazil has an obligation to report periodically to the UN Human Rights Committee on measures taken to implement the provisions of the Covenant in the country. Brazil's second periodic report, which was due in 1998, will be presented to the UN Human Rights Committee by a government delegation in a public meeting on 26 and 27 October in Geneva.

For a copy of Amnesty International's briefing to the Human Rights Committee on Brazil's report, please see: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/ENGAMR190212005>

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