

PRESS STATEMENT

UN Special Rapporteur finds that killings by Brazilian police continue at alarming rates, Government has failed to take all necessary action

New York, 1 June 2010.

“Daily life for too many Brazilians, especially those living in favelas, is still lived in the shadow of killings and violence by gangs, militias, death squads and the police, despite important reforms by the Government”, said the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial executions today, as he released a follow-up report on the progress Brazil has made in reducing police killings since his 2007 visit.

“When I visited the country two and a half years ago,” said Professor Philip Alston, the UN Special Rapporteur, “I found that the police executed suspected criminals and innocent citizens during poorly planned and counter-productive war-style operations into favelas. Off-duty police, operating in death squads and militias, also killed civilians, either as ‘vigilantes’ or for profit.”

“Today, the situation on the ground has not changed dramatically. The police continue to commit extrajudicial executions at alarming rates,” the expert found. “And they generally get away with them.”

Reviewing federal and state Government actions over the past two years, the expert’s report singled out Brazil for noteworthy improvements in certain areas. “Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Pernambuco have investigated militias and death squads and the fact that some police have been arrested is very positive”, he said. “In addition, new efforts at community policing in a handful of Rio de Janeiro’s favelas are very welcome, as is the federal Government’s promise to increased salaries to improve security in anticipation of the World Cup in 2014 and the Olympic Games in 2016. But these efforts will require a much greater push if they are to bring the security hoped for within the next four years.”

In other key areas, however, he noted that far too little has been done. “Resistance killings continue at a great rate” he said, referring to police killings which are then reported as having occurred in self-defence. “There were at least 11,000 so-called resistance killings in Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro between 2003 and 2009. The evidence shows clearly that many of these killings were actually executions. But the police at the scene label them resistance killings, and they are almost never seriously investigated. The Government has not yet stopped this abusive practice.” The expert found that, in fact, resistance killings have increased in Sao Paulo since 2007. He called on Brazil to, “abolish this category which gives a shooting licence to the police, and investigate such killings like any other deaths.”

He welcomed Rio’s new UPP (Pacifying Police Units) experimental approach which replaces violent short-term interventions in favelas with a long-term police presence and social services provision. “The UPP concept is a very welcome step forward because it brings the prospect of real and sustained security”, he said. “But there are also increasing reports of harassment of favela residents by the UPPs, and the promised social services have not always been delivered.” The main challenge is to greatly expand the program since “hundreds of favelas continue either to be untouched or to be still subject to the old mentality that occasional violent invasions can bring security.”

“The Government of Brazil deserves much credit for its cooperation and openness to external scrutiny,” said the Special Rapporteur. “But much remains to be done if the Government is to achieve its aim of reducing extrajudicial executions by the police.”

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The Special Rapporteur’s report is contained in A/HRC/14/24/Add.4. For further information, please contact the Special Rapporteur at the following address: sarah.knuckey@nyu.edu.

Professor Alston was appointed UN Special Rapporteur in 2004 and reports to the United Nations Human Rights Council and the General Assembly. He has had extensive experience in the human rights field, including eight years as Chairperson of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, principal legal adviser to UNICEF in the drafting of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and Special Adviser to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. He is Professor of Law and Faculty Director of the Center for Human Rights and Global Justice at New York University School of Law. For information on the mandate of the Special Rapporteur, see: www.extrajudicialexecutions.org.