

Brazil to Buy Back 300,000 Weapons from Civilians

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Brazil's Minister of Justice, Márcio Thomaz Bastos, said that the Brazilian government is willing to make it as easy as possible for people to disarm. "We shall start a snowball rolling that will never stop. As long as there are arms in the country, we shall go after them," he affirmed. Bastos commemorated the total of 80 thousand weapons turned in in less than three months.

The expectation now is to round up 300 thousand weapons by December, the deadline for regularizing or turning in unregistered arms.

The Minister also said that the National Congress was sent a bill requesting US\$ 6.8 million (20 million reais) in supplementary funds. The original budget was US\$ 3.4 million (10 million reais).

A toll free telephone number was set up to remove any doubts the population may have about turning in, bearing, and regularizing arms.

The number (0800-729-0038) will be announced in a publicity campaign launched yesterday September 2 by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

The campaign consists of four 30-second clips for television, radio appeals, and posters calling for Brazilians to hand over their weapons.

Broadcasts of the commercials by radio and television stations will be free and voluntary.

Bastos also announced that the state governors will receive visits asking them to support the campaign.

"We shall request them to open doors and facilitate matters. What is important is to unleash all the forces that want to bring in arms in order to make this campaign as comprehensive as possible," he said.

"I believe we have an adequate infrastructure to make this campaign successful, because it will be bad for crime and good for Brazil," he added.

The Minister remarked that the disarmament campaign represents an important step in the fight against violence and organized crime.

"There are already early signs that in some of the places where the campaign was conducted with vigor, there has been a statistical reduction in the number of crimes involving firearms," he pointed out.

Data from the Ministry of Justice demonstrate that around 100 Brazilians die each day as a result of gunshot wounds. Most of the victims are males in the 15-34 age bracket.

Demolition

The first demolition of firearms turned in to the Federal Police (PF) as part of the National Disarmament Campaign took place in a public ceremony last month.

The head of the PF's National Arms System (Sirnam), Commissioner Fernando Segóvia said that the idea is to erect "a monument to peace and life" with the scrap from the destroyed weapons.

The federal government initially hoped to remove 80 thousand weapons from circulation by the end of the year, but in around a month the population has already turned in over 52 thousand arms, according to Segóvia.

All the armament delivered to the PF will be destroyed by the Army Command. All those who turn in arms will receive R\$ 100 to R\$ 300 in compensation. The maximum sum will be paid for semiautomatics and some types of pistols. The government has 30 days to deposit the money in the checking account indicated by the applicant.

Owners of unregistered weapons will be obliged to turn them in or register them in compliance with legal prerequisites by December 23.

Otherwise, from this date on, they will be in criminal violation and are liable to be sent to jail if caught red-handed with a weapon, since the Disarmament Statute determines that illegal bearing of weapons is a crime without bail.

The Commissioner assured that no citizen who turns in an unregistered weapon by December 23 will be investigated. "He will not answer for the crime; we don't care who the person is who possesses the weapon; we just want to destroy it."

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