

108,000 Firearms Turned In by Brazilians

Contributed by Luciana Vasconcelos
Wednesday, 29 September 2004

Brazil's NGO, Viva Rio, celebrated its Disarmament Campaign Day yesterday with demonstrations throughout the city of Rio de Janeiro. The objective of the campaign is to make people aware of the danger a firearm represents.

The campaign slogan is: "Get rid of your gun before it gets rid of you!"

Rio de Janeiro has turned out to be the state with the second biggest number of weapons turned in as part of the government's disarmament program, which "buys" guns from people to get them out of circulation.

So far the state has received around 20,000 firearms, which are destroyed immediately.

More Money

Supplementary funds of around US\$ 7 million (20 million reais) were released through a "temporary measure" (medida provisória) to be used to "buy" firearms that people turn into authorities as part of the government's Disarmament Program.

So far a total of 108,000 weapons have been turned in nationwide, outstripping expectations which were that 80,000 would be turned in by December. Thus, the need for additional funding.

When the program was launched on September 2, minister of Justice, Marcio Thomaz Bastos, declared that the government was ready to do whatever was necessary to disarm the country.

"We hope this will be a snowball and just keep growing. As long as there are guns in Brazil we will go after them," said the Minister.

Disarmament Statute

The Disarmament Statute was sanctioned by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva on December 22, 2003. The statute regulates the registration, possession, and sale of firearms in Brazil and establishes heavier penalties for crimes involving firearms.

In accordance with the Disarmament Statute, crimes such as the illegal bearing and possession of firearms, random discharge of firearms on a public thoroughfare, and arms trafficking and smuggling are subject to penalties ranging from 2-12 years and, in some cases, are ineligible for bail.

The goal is to reduce arms circulation in the country, as well as cutting off the sources that supply organized crime.

In October, 2005, there will be a general referendum for the population to decide whether it is in favor of prohibiting the sale of firearms. The definitive prohibition of arms production will also be considered.

Agência Brasil
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