

For Brazil Non-Custodial Sentences Make Big Sense

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It has become customary in Brazil for most people who commit small crimes to get what is known as non-custodial sentencing. Instead of going to jail, they do community services or have to buy basic baskets for the needy.

The Ministry of Justice has just released a report showing that recidivism in non-custodial sentencing is a low 5%, compared to 65% when criminals go to prison.

From the point of view of the courts, non-custodial sentencing is a way to avoid having someone who committed a first crime, usually a small crime, go to prison and get thrown in with criminals who have committed serious crimes.

At the moment, Brazil has 330,000 people sentenced for crimes. Around ten percent, 32,000, are serving non-custodial sentences. The Ministry of Justice says that number could be doubled to around 66,000.

Another fact that makes non-custodial sentencing attractive is that it is much cheaper.

Keeping someone in prison costs around US\$ 421 (1,000 reais) per month. The cost to the government of a person serving a non-custodial sentence is around US\$ 29 (70 reais) per month.

Last month judges and prosecutors from all over Brazil met in Fortaleza for a series of conferences on the issue of non-custodial sentencing, its use and control, and the reintegration of criminals into society.

The conferences were entitled, "Regional Cycle of Conferences on Alternative Penalties and Measures" and "First National Encounter on Social Reintegration".

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