

Industry of Fear Thrives in Brazil

Contributed by Lúcia Nórcio
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The original target was to collect 80,000 weapons by the end of the year. But the response has been much greater than expected and Brazilian Minister of Justice, Marcio Thomaz Bastos, reports that already Brazil's Disarmament Campaign has collected 120,000 weapons.

"We have raised our sights and now think we can collect 200,000 by December," said the Minister.

Bastos is in the state of Paraná, South region, to launch a Disarmament Campaign Caravan that will travel around the country. Paraná will kick off the caravan because it was the first state to officially join the disarmament campaign at the beginning of the year. The state collected 20,000 weapons in six months.

The objective of the caravan is to make people aware of the importance of turning in weapons to the police. Bastos reports that as of now churches, radio stations and health centers will also be receiving weapons because some people are afraid of going to the police.

In July, Brazil's president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva signed a decree containing the necessary legislation to make the Disarmament Statute law.

The decree has 77 articles on a wide variety of items. It deals with types of weapons, their use and restrictions on use, as well as regulations for ownership.

The decree also establishes the National Weapons System (Sinam), housed in the Ministry of Justice, and the Military Weapons Management System, housed in the Ministry of Defense.

There will be restrictions on imports of weapons. The restrictions are detailed in the decree. All police firearms will have to be registered. Firearm licenses will have to be renewed every three years. The government has initially US\$ 3.2 million to compensate people who turn in weapons.

Disproportionate Killing

"Although Brazilians are only 2.8% of the world's population, the country has 11% of all the homicides committed on the planet. Unfortunately, that is a number that just keeps rising," laments Carlos Lopes, who represents the UN Development Program in Brazil. Lopes made his comments at the opening of an international seminar on weapons in Rio de Janeiro, at the end of April.

According to Lopes, in Brazil 40,000 people are killed annually by firearms. "That is more than the number of people killed in Iraq. It is difficult to comprehend that so many people die from gun wounds here, after all Brazil is supposed to be at peace," he said.

Lopes says that UN data shows that people in the private sector (this does not include the military) are spending almost US\$ 24 billion (R\$ 70 billion) annually for protection; this is the so-called "industry of fear."

It is a thriving business that siphons off money from areas that need investments, such as social assistance, he explained.

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