

Leader of Prison Massacre in Brazil Goes from 632 Years in Jail to Innocent

Contributed by Bruno Bocchini
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In 1992 there was a rebellion at the infamous Carandiru prison in São Paulo, in the Brazilian southeast. Led by a colonel of the Polícia Militar, Ubiratan Guimarães, law enforcement agents invaded one of the prison buildings with the result that 111 prisoners were killed.

Colonel Guimarães went to trial for the deaths of 102 of the prisoners, was found guilty by a jury and sentenced to 632 years in jail. Because he did not have a criminal record, colonel Guimarães did not go to jail while he appealed the case.

Yesterday the case was heard by an appellate court (Tribunal de Justiça de São Paulo), which voted 20 to 2 to exculpate the colonel.

Since the massacre the prison has been deactivated; it was imploded in 2002 to make way for a park.

"Once again it has been shown that what we always said is the truth. It has been proved that we were just doing our duty," said Guimarães after the decision was announced.

"We did not want to kill anybody. We wanted to save lives and we did save a lot of lives. We did not give orders to kill. On the contrary, the order was to save the lives of those caught in the crossfire and reestablish order."

Asked why so many people died, the colonel declared that he was forced to defend himself and his men. "There were more than 2,200 inmates, most of them in open rebellion. They confronted the police and we had to defend ourselves," he said.

Under Brazilian law it is quite possible that the case will be appealed again and go back to court.

For Ariel de Castro Alves, coordinator of Brazil's National Movement for Human Rights, the court's decision will generate international embarrassment. Alves believes that the decision gives police "a license to kill."

"From now on the police can just go into prisons and kill people and they will be just doing their job, protected by the law, with jurisprudence from São Paulo's appellate court, which is really an absurd, something lamentable that creates international embarrassment."

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