

# Amnesty Calls for and End to Brazil's Big Skull Military Van

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Police officers in Rio de Janeiro must stop using military-style armored vehicles to indiscriminately kill innocent bystanders or commit other gross human rights violations in the city's favelas, said Amnesty International as it launched a new campaign in collaboration with other human rights organizations in Brazil.

The Caveirão (The Big Skull) - as it is more commonly known - has become the emblem of Rio de Janeiro's elite police force, the Batalhão de Operações Policiais Especiais, (BOPE) and is feared by residents in the areas it operates.

Local human rights organizations have received a series of shocking eyewitness reports of caveirões entering communities firing at random, while using loudspeakers to intimidate the population.

Between May and September 2005, 11 people were killed in operations involving the Caveirão.

Speaking at the launch of the campaign against the use of the Caveirão in Brazil's favelas Global Justice's Marcelo Freixo said:

"The Caveirão has become a powerful symbol of the failings of public security policies in Rio de Janeiro. It typifies the police's confrontational and divisive approach to Rio's public security crisis."

The campaign, organized by Amnesty International, Justiça Global, the Rede de Comunidades e Movimentos contra a Violência, and the Centro de Defesa de Direitos Humanos de Petrópolis will call on the state governor of Rio de Janeiro, Rosângela Rosinha Garotinho de Oliveira, to take forward a comprehensive reform of Rio's security policies, particularly around favelas.

Specifically, the group is calling on the state authorities to stop using the Caveirão to kill indiscriminately, to intimidate whole communities and to mount operations involving the excessive use of force.

Marcelo Freixo said:

"Using violence to combat violence is fundamentally counter-productive. Not only does it lead to tragic deaths of innocent bystanders, but it does not solve the problems of escalating criminal violence in Rio de Janeiro."

Amnesty International's Brazil researcher, Tim Cahill said:

"By deploying a vehicle to aggressively and indiscriminately target whole communities, the authorities are using the Caveirão as a tool of intimidation.

"The police have a legitimate right to protect themselves as they go about their work but they also have a duty to protect the communities they serve."

The overall police strategy when dealing with Rio's security crisis has polarized its population, and lead to a collapse of confidence in the state's ability to protect all the city's citizens.

Security for all will never be achieved through violence and intimidation. An inclusive public security policy based on respect for human rights must be introduced without delay. Only then will there be an end to the cycle of violence in Rio de Janeiro.

## Background Information

In July 2005 11-year-old Carlos Henrique was on his way home when police stormed the Vila do João favela. According to eyewitnesses, he was shot in the head by a bullet fired from a military-style vehicle, popularly known as the Caveirão.

In October 2004, Global Justice launched the report "Police Violence and Public Insecurity", which examines the root causes of violence in Rio de Janeiro today.

The report concluded that state policy effectively "criminalized poverty", concentrating violence in the city's most vulnerable communities.

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