

Brazil Is Betting Disarming Will Lower the Killing

Contributed by Flavio Rocha
Friday, 12 November 2004

More than 40,000 people in Brazil are killed each year by firearms. The problem has become so serious that many families who live in violent, metropolitan areas are afraid to send their kids to school.

In Rio de Janeiro, for example, over the last few years there have been various victims of stray bullets from gun battles.

Without a doubt, the problem is aggravated with easy access to firearms, especially through people connected to drug trafficking.

Another big problem is the belief by many that they must arm themselves in order to be prepared for a possible assault.

Seeing the dimensions of this serious problem, the Brazilian federal government created a program in which any citizen can turn in his/her gun(s) in for a cash rebate, varying between US\$30-100.

The weapons can be turned into any Federal Police or Military post. No questions are asked, and no one goes to jail in the act of turning in the weapons, even though there is already a new law which requires special authorization for any kind of gun.

So far the program has been a success. The goal was to collect 80,000 guns by the end of the year: at the end of September, 110,000 guns had been turned in.

The government had already committed US\$ 3 million to the project, but has promised to double that in the hopes of collecting even more arms.

This is not the first time the government has promoted this type of action. Certainly, it will not definitively resolve the problem of violence, especially in a country like Brazil where social problems loom so largely.

But certainly it will diminish the number of persons who possess arms without any sort of training as well as the number of accidents that happen in the home.

Small steps are being taken, but it is also necessary to work on other areas, such as agrarian reform which would diminish the large number of people migrating to the big cities.

And with this, there would be less unemployment, one of the great generators of violence in Brazil.

SEJUP - Brazilian Service of Justice and Peace
www.sejup.org