

Brazil Prisons Get 187 Young Adults Every Day

Contributed by Eduardo Scolese
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The latest study out by the Brazilian Ministry of Justice shows that every hour, at least seven men between the ages of 18 to 29 enter into the Brazilian prison system. This rate - 68,400 per year - is 58% greater than the number who leave the prison system, 43,200 per year. This means that 187 young men enter every day, while only 118 leave.

The numbers taken from the last 12 months were released with the unveiling of the new National Program of Public Security and Citizenship (Pronasci). The objective of the program is to integrate security measures with social policies. The 40 components of the program have a cost of US\$ 500 million per year. The initial focus of the program will be in 11 metropolitan regions, each to receive a new prison just for youth.

Of the 240,000 young prisoners in the country, 65% (160,000) are in these 11 metropolitan regions (in the states of Alagoas, Minas Gerais, Espírito Santo, Pernambuco, Bahia, Pará, Paraná, Federal District, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Rio Grande do Sul), which were chosen by the federal government based on their high number of homicides.

One of the problems the program will face is recidivism. "Of all who enter into the penitentiary system, 70%, including youths, are repeat offenders. If by the year 2010 we can reduce this rate by half, that would be an extraordinary thing," said Tarso Genro, the Minister of Justice.

"The youth that we are looking for are those who don't want to go to the state's social programs, who are not received into the social programs, who have their life controlled by crime. And the youth whose family is torn apart."

According to the Secretary General of the Presidency, of the 50.5 million Brazilian youths between the ages of 15 and 29, 4.5 million are considered to be at-risk, as they have no elementary schooling, are not enrolled in school, and are unemployed.

One alarming statistic is that the illiteracy rate among young prisoners is 15%. Because of this, Pronasci has a plan which diminishes prison time for those who study. They will take exams and will have two days taken off their sentence for every 20 hours of study.

Recently, the Ministry of Justice sponsored a series of debates over the program with social entities and movements. In the presentations, the government highlighted its plans to do "occupations" of areas infamous for high crime rates.

An "occupation" has been happening in one such area in Rio de Janeiro since May 2 of this year. So far, 44 have been killed by police, 19 of whom on June 27.

Rosiana Queiroz, of the National Movement of Human Rights, expressed concern about this element of the program. "I have few illusions in relation to government programs. Principally because President Lula has a very narrow and mistaken vision concerning the relation between public security and human rights," said Queiroz.

"This 'occupation' of territory is worrisome in relation to the violation of human rights. An occupation should be done over a long period of time."

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