

Police violence shakes Brazil

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Two new unfortunate events of police violence shocked Brazil in the last week.

By María Josefina Arce

Two new unfortunate events of police violence shocked Brazil in the last week. The excessive use of force by law enforcement officers has become a constant in the South American giant, where Afro-descendants and poor people are the main targets.

A young disabled Black man is the most recent victim. Genivaldo de Jesus Santos died after being locked in the trunk of a police car and suffocated with tear gas, according to videos published by the Brazilian press.

The young man was detained by highway patrol officers, and although he complied with the order immediately, according to witnesses, he was beaten and put in the trunk from where a thick smoke was coming out.

A few days earlier some 25 people were killed in the favela of Vila Cruzeiro, in Rio de Janeiro, during a police operation against alleged drug traffickers. Neighbors of the community denounced that the agents did not hesitate to invade houses and kill even with bladed weapons. There are also suspicions of torture

and summary executions by the uniformed officers.

The event became the second most tragic action in Rio de Janeiro. A year ago 28 people died in the favela of Jacarezinho also during an operation against drug trafficking.

The police violence has aroused the concern of the UN, which urged the government presided by the ultra-right-wing Jair Bolsonaro to adopt urgent measures to prevent the occurrence of new events of this nature and impunity.

Referring to the murder of the young Genivaldo de Jesus Santos, the UN Human Rights representative, Jan Jarab, pointed out that police violence against the black population in Brazil is extreme and so common that it seems naturalized, and described the event as shocking and disrespectful of citizens' prerogatives.

The reality is that, according to the Brazilian Public Safety Forum, last year 79% of deaths at the hands of the police corresponded to citizens of African descent.

During Bolsonaro's term in office, the excessive use of force by law enforcement officers has increased, given his open support for such actions.

In fact, after the event in Vila Cruzeiro, the former army captain highlighted the performance of the agents, whom he even described as brave warriors.

The truth is that reports from human rights and civil society organizations reveal that Brazil has one of the most murderous police forces in the world. In 2021, more than 6,100 fatalities were recorded in the actions of uniformed officers.

Although it is not a new phenomenon, the president's discourse does not help, but rather irresponsibly encourages the excessive use of force against blacks and the poor, who are associated with criminal acts with a discriminatory and racist perspective.

Analysts affirm that in practice, officers act differently in wealthy neighborhoods than in poor communities. In the first case they only shoot in self-defense, while in the favelas they see them as hostile territory and shoot first and ask questions later.

Impunity also surrounds these violent actions. Many of the investigations into these events are closed without charges being filed or the culprits are acquitted.

A few days have passed since the last unfortunate events, and the Bolsonaro government seems willing to encourage its police forces despite the violence exercised. He plans to cut funds earmarked for health, education and science in order to allocate them to a salary increase for this highly questioned force, which is not trusted by the majority of Brazilians.

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