

# **Armed Violence Reduction Programming in Brazil**

By Ilona Szabo de Carvalho

## **Introduction**

Brazil presents levels of armed violence that are higher than those of countries at war. Several factors have contributed to the increase of armed violence rates since the 80's, including the country's urbanization process, lack of public policies that address the needs of the agents of violence, the fierce control and availability of small arms, and weak and corrupt public security institutions.

Despite that, in the last years, local and national initiatives have demonstrated that it's possible to control and reduce armed violence if integrated projects and public policies, which take into consideration the multi-faceted character of armed violence are implemented, and if credible health and police data are used to inform and guide these interventions.

This background paper aims at analysing the impact of a Brazilian National Framework, called the Disarmament Statute, that directly addresses the main instruments of armed violence in the country, which are the small arms, and that also strengthens public security institutions' capacity, by improving data collection and SALW control. Besides that, it aims to demonstrate the key role information plays in the designing, monitoring and evaluation of armed violence reduction programs.

## **Armed Violence in Brazil**

Armed violence is one of the most pressing health, development and security issues Brazil faces today. The country has the highest recorded number of fire-arm related deaths of any

country in the world, including those at war. In 2004, 36.091 people in Brazil were killed by firearms. Of those, 91% were Homicides, 5% unknown, 3% Suicide and 1% Accident<sup>1</sup>.

The cost of violence in the country has been estimated in 10,5% of GDP<sup>2</sup> and the annual costs of hospitalization due to firearm related injuries at the Public Health Sector is estimated to be between 36 and 39 million dollars.<sup>3</sup>

Despite its magnitude, escalation of armed violence is a recent phenomenon, starting in the 80's and reaching alarming proportions from the mid-nineties onwards. Gun violence rates have tripled in the two past decades, from 7.2 per 100,000 residents in 1982 to 21.2 per 100,000 residents in 2002 (Graph1)<sup>4</sup>. At the same time, armed violence has spread geographically throughout the country, having its worse impacts in the country's metropolitan regions and medium cities.

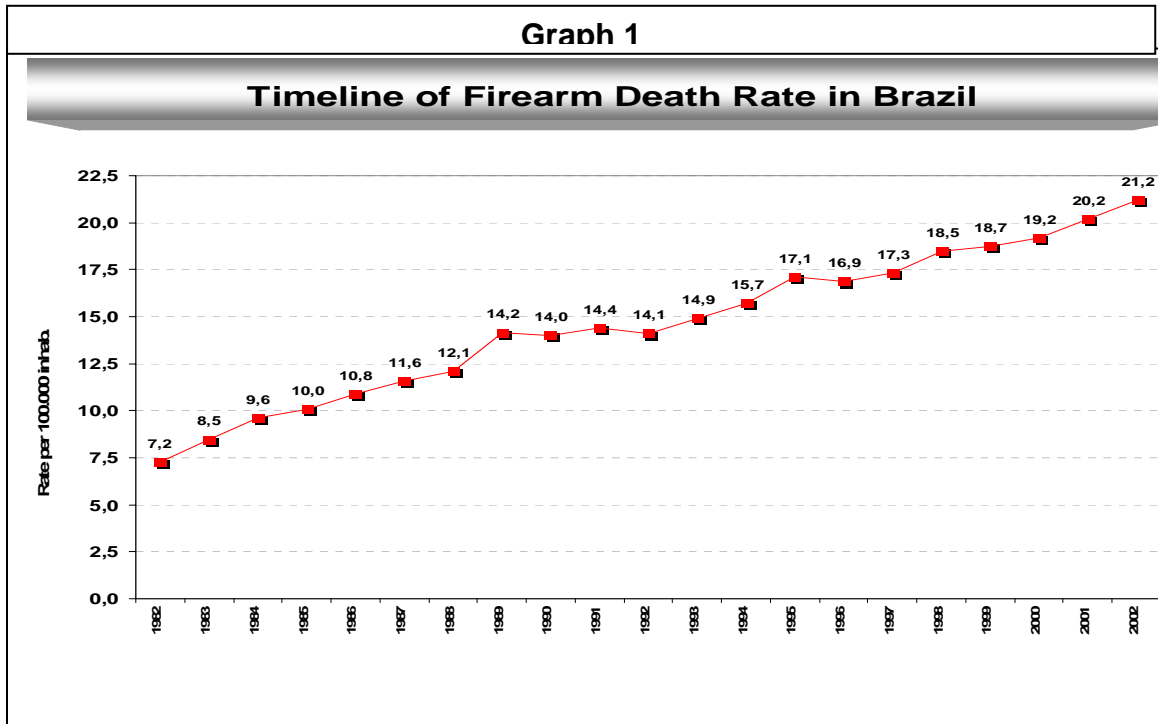
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<sup>1</sup> Ministério da Saúde, Secretaria de Vigilância em Saúde. 2005. Impacto da Campanha do Desarmamento no Índice Nacional de Mortalidade por Arma de Fogo. Brasília – Brasil.

<sup>2</sup> Briceño, León, Roberto. 2002. La Nueva Violencia Urbana de América Latina, Sociologías, Nº 8 2002, pp.34-51

<sup>3</sup> Phebo, Luciana: "The Impact of Firearms on Health in Brazil" in Fernandes, Rubem César, et. al.: *Brazil: the Arms and the Victims* (Small Arms Survey, Viva Rio, ISER: 2005).

<sup>4</sup> Brazilian Health Ministry, DATASUS: 2002



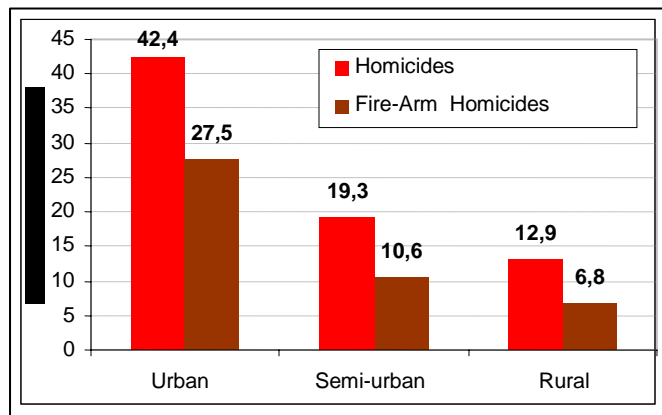
The increase of armed violence is linked to the rapid and unplanned process of urbanization that occurred in Brazil as in several other Latin American countries. From the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the country started a fast urbanization process. In 1950, 70% of the population lived in the rural areas and in the year 2000, this figure decreased to less than 20%<sup>5</sup>.

A recent study about violence in the 5.507 Brazilian municipalities in 2002, demonstrates the relationship between armed violence and urbanization<sup>6</sup>. Inequality is not only present in the country's income distribution<sup>i</sup>, but also in its distribution of violence.

**Graph 2 - Homicide and Firearm Homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants in Brazilian Municipalities**

<sup>5</sup> Brazilian urbanization rate: 1950 (30,8%); 2000 (79,7%) – source: Anuário estatístico do Brasil 1979. Rio de Janeiro: IBGE, v. 40, 1979 and Pesquisa nacional por amostra de domicílios 1999, IBGE, 2000. For a comprehensive view of populational, social, political, cultural and economical statistics on Brazil during the 20<sup>th</sup> century see *Estatísticas do século XX* / IBGE, Centro de Documentação e Disseminação de Informações – Rio de Janeiro: IBGE, 2003 (also available at [www.ibge.gov.br/english/default.php](http://www.ibge.gov.br/english/default.php))

<sup>6</sup> Fernandes Cesar, Rubem y de Sousa Nascimento, Marcelo. 2007. “Mapping the Divide: Armed Violence and Urbanization in Brazil”, at: Small Arms Survey 2007 Yearbook. Geneva, Small Arms Survey.



Fuente: Fernandes y Nascimento Sousa, 2006

As shown in Graph 2, the role played by firearms increases as one moves from rural, to medium urban, to urban areas.

In the poor urban areas, generally forgotten by public policies, the main agents and victims of armed violence in Brazil, which are the youth, are found. This risk group is mainly composed by young males from 15 to 24 years of age that have dropped out of school before completing elementary education and do not work. They represent 22% of the population at the stated age group, have difficulties in accessing the formal market place, are generally part of unstructured families, and end up taking part of illicit activities, predominantly drug trade and trafficking<sup>7</sup>.

Within this context, the armed violence spiral is worsened by the availability of guns, which are the main instruments used to perpetrate violence in the country. It is estimated that there are around 17 million firearms in Brazil, of which 1,750,000 are State holdings and over 15,250,000 are private holdings, both legal and illegal. Civilian Possession accounts for 52% of the total<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> Dowdney, Luke T. 2003. *Children of the Drug Trade: A Case Study of Organised Armed Violence in Rio de Janeiro*. Rio de Janeiro: Viva Rio/ISER, 7 Letras.

[http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/files/portal/issueareas/perpetrators/perpet\\_pdf/2003\\_Dowdney.pdf](http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/files/portal/issueareas/perpetrators/perpet_pdf/2003_Dowdney.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Dreyfus, Pablo and Marcelo de Sousa Nascimento. 2005. 'Small Arms Holdings in Brazil: Toward a Comprehensive Mapping of Guns and Their Owners.' In Fernandes, Rubem Cesar. *Brazil: The Arms and the Victims*. Rio de Janeiro: ISER, Viva Rio, and Small Arms Survey, pp. 94–145.

[http://www.vivario.org.br/publicue/media/Small\\_Arms\\_Holding\\_in\\_Brazil\\_Toward\\_a\\_comprehensive\\_mapping\\_of\\_guns\\_and\\_their\\_owners\\_By\\_Pablo\\_Dreyfus\\_e\\_Marcelo\\_de\\_Souza\\_Nascimento.pdf](http://www.vivario.org.br/publicue/media/Small_Arms_Holding_in_Brazil_Toward_a_comprehensive_mapping_of_guns_and_their_owners_By_Pablo_Dreyfus_e_Marcelo_de_Souza_Nascimento.pdf)

These three aspects presented above: the fast urbanization process that boosted inequality; the lack of public policies and opportunities for the youth; and the availability and easy access to the illicit market of guns, are worsened by the weak institutional capacity of most of the 57 Brazilian Police Forces.

With the exception of the Federal Police and of a few State's Polices, which have been undertaking important reforms, the security sector in Brazil has been unable to respond to the challenges armed violence poses and to integrate security and human rights' goals. Backwardness, lack of adequate training, proper equipment, and most of all, a very low salary, opens door for corruption and involvement of policemen in illegal activities. Part of the police agents are known worldwide for their arbitrariness, abuses, close relationship with criminal organisations, and extreme violence, they are also agents of armed violence.

At the moment, besides being highly demanded to being able to cope with the different aspects of armed violence, Police Corporations are being challenged to fight corruption and arbitrary acts within its ranks, as well as to improve relationship among police officers and citizens, especially with those from the poor urban areas.

### **Brazilian National Frameworks / Interventions to Reduce and Prevent Armed Violence**

This background paper will focus on the Impact of the new Brazilian Arms Control Law, approved on December 22, 2003, known as the Disarmament Statute. More specifically, it will focus on the implementation of two articles: the prohibition for civilians to carry firearms and the gun buy-back campaign.

But it's worth mentioning though, that the Ministry of Justice has just launched, on August 20, 2007, a National Program for Public Security and Citizenship (PRONASCI),

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which has been presented and discussed with different segments of the Brazilian society, actors from different levels of government and with international agencies as well.

The plan has a three-pronged approach to violence prevention involving integrated public security policies based on development actions; special attention to children and youth already involved in criminal activities, within and out of the judicial system; and territorial actions concentrated in metropolitan regions. It also includes SALW control policies.

This approach has an innovative character if one considers that it is the first Brazilian National Framework that aims to integrate security and development and that it prioritizes the high risk group of armed violence, which is historically neglected by public policies in Brazil. Besides that, another key aspect of the PRONASCI is the coordination of actions with other government bodies and levels. The Ministry of Justice is involving other Ministries such as the Labor, Education, Sports, Urban Development/Cities and Culture and calls for the cooperation of the federal, state and municipal spheres of government. If the plan is implemented, it will also serve to signal that by signing the Geneva Declaration, the Brazilian Government abides by its recommendations not just in theory but in practice.

It's important to support and follow-up on this initiative and its impacts, as if successfully implemented it can serve as a model to other countries that face similar problems, as the Disarmament Statute, described below, has been serving.

### The Disarmament Statute

The Disarmament Statute is a national law that is progressively being implemented since its approval on December, 2003. It's a Gun Control Law that has positive implications mainly on two of the key aspects of armed violence described above, instruments, by regulating firearms' possession and reducing the availability of guns, and the institutions, by improving police forces' capacity to control and trace guns and ammunition. The

Statute of Disarmament comprises a set of 37 articles, which includes the prohibition for civilians to carry firearms and a gun buy-back program.

<b>The Disarmament Statute (Law 10.826) – Main Articles</b>
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- It is illegal for civilians to carry firearms;
- The control of arms and ammunition is centralized;
- All ammunition sold to public security forces is marked;
- Illegally carrying firearms is a crime resulting in a sentence of 2-6 years;
- The minimum age required to purchase a firearm is 25 years;
- Testing for psychological stability and knowledge of firearm-use are necessary for the purchase of all firearms;
- The possession of firearms is restricted to the home and workplace;
- All arms, including unregistered and confiscated weapons, can be voluntarily ceded.
- The Statute also called for a popular referendum to decide whether the sale of arms and ammunition should be prohibited in Brazil<sup>9</sup>.

The Prohibition for Civilians to Carry Firearms (Article 6 of the Disarmament Statute)

Although arms possession and carrying alone can not be proved to be a source of armed violence, different researches have demonstrated that it becomes a very important issue to be addressed in contexts where other factors, such as inequality, unemployment and demographic density, are present<sup>10</sup>.

In Brazil, in contrary to the population's perception, a great part of firearm homicides are inter-personal crimes (*crimes de proximidade*), thus, not linked or attributed to organized

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<sup>9</sup> The Referendum was held on October 23, 2005. 78% of the 122.042.615 Brazilian voters, participated. 64% voted against the prohibition of sale and 36% voted in favor. Therefore, the sale of firearms to civilians in Brazil was not prohibited.

<sup>10</sup> Fernandes Cesar, Rubem y de Sousa Nascimento, Marcelo. 2007. "Mapping the Divide: Armed Violence and Urbanization in Brazil", at: Small Arms Survey 2007 Yearbook. Geneva, Small Arms Survey.

crime. Some of them could be avoided if a gun was not present at the crime scene. Bar fights, soccer games disputes, domestic violence, relationship crimes (crimes passionais), revenge, can end up in a homicide due to the availability and lethality of a firearm.

The Disarmament Statute banned the right of civilians to carry guns in Brazil, with an exception to certain categories of public employees and to citizens that can prove they are at a death threat, in the later, the right to carry gun is temporary.

Requirements for civilians' possession are much higher and strict than before. Despite not being one of the main reasons citizens stated when handing in their guns at the gun buy-back campaign explained below, it contributed to that.

#### The Gun Buy-Back Campaign (Articles 31 and 32 of the Disarmament Statute)

Beginning on July 15, 2004, the Voluntary Collection of Arms Campaign (CEVA) provided an amnesty to those who ceded any kind of arms—registered or not, of legal or restricted use—and went on to compensate those who turned in arms a sum ranging from \$40-\$120 (USD), depending on the caliber of the weapon. A Campaign's National Committee was formed by the Ministry of Justice, the Federal Police, NGO's, such as Viva Rio and Sou da Paz, and religious leaders.

At first, guns could only be handed at Federal Police Stations. As they are very few in the country, agreements with State Police, Army Units and Civil Society organizations were signed. Civilian posts for the collection of arms instituted the practice of "*marretada*," in which ceded arms were smashed with a hammer upon cession. This practice gave a strong credibility to the campaign, as one major concern of the population was the final destination of the guns ceded.

<b>The Gun Buy-Back Campaign: How did it work?</b>
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- **Amnesty:** anyone could hand in a registered, non-registered, or illegal gun, and receive financial compensation. The original deadline of 6 months was extended twice. At total, the campaign lasted 15 months.
- **Anonymity:** no questions were asked by the police to citizens handing in guns
- **Reimbursement: from R\$ 100 to R\$ 300 (USD 40 to USD 120),** depending on the caliber of the gun, to be paid in 30 days, by the Federal Police.
- **Destruction:** guns were destroyed by the army after they got through legal ballistics exam. At Civilian collection posts, guns were smashed on the spot with a hammer, after having been carefully classified and registered.
- **Collection Posts:** Federal Police Stations, Civil Police Stations, Army Headquarters.
- **Civil Society Posts:** Viva Rio had an agreement with the Federal, Civilian and Military Police and has received guns since the 4th of August, 2004 in its headquarters and in partnership with other organizations, especially churches. In total, Viva Rio had 59 collection posts and two mobile units, which visited different neighborhoods in Rio, its metropolitan region and other regions within the state. Besides that, Viva Rio has trained volunteers from over 400 churches and NGO's from the 23 out of 27 Brazilian States to open civilian collection posts.

The original goal to collect 80,000 arms in the course of six months was surpassed in the second month after the campaign started, and in light of these results, the campaign was prolonged until June 23<sup>rd</sup>, and later October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2005, the date eventually set for a referendum. At the end of the campaign, a total of 459,855 arms were collected and destroyed throughout Brazil.

### **The Impact of the Disarmament Statute**

As surprising as the success of the Buy-Back Campaign, were the first sets of data released by the Brazilian Ministry of Health in August of 2005, which indicated the positive effect of the new law on the rates of armed violence in Brazil. The year of 2004

was the first since 1992, in which deaths by firearms in the country decreased. In 2003, 39,325 people were killed by firearms; in 2004 this number fell to 36,091, a decrease of 8.2%. The main reasons attributed by the Health Ministry to explain the decrease were the prohibition for civilians to carry guns and the support of the population for the Voluntary Collection of Arms Campaign, both are measures from the Disarmament Statute. According to the report, there was not any other national policy or intervention at that period that could generate the same impact country-wide.

The number of firearm related deaths decreased in 18, out of the 27 Brazilian States. In States where a decrease did not happen, the increase was smaller than the trends have estimated. Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, two of the most relevant Brazilian States in terms of armed violence, experienced a decrease of 10% and 19% in their absolute numbers of gun deaths, respectively. Besides that, in 2004, the number of firearm accidental deaths diminished 29% if compared with 2003 figures<sup>11</sup>.

A report released by UNESCO goes further and by using a methodology called *Experimento de Séries Temporais*, got to the conclusion that thanks to the disarmament strategy, not only a decrease of 8,2% of the number of firearm related deaths has occurred, but also the historical trend of the increase of firearm in the order of 7,2% per year was broken. Therefore its conclusion is that the impact of the Disarmament Statute was in total of 15,4% in the number of deaths by firearms, thus a total of 5.563 were saved. The research also states that there wasn't an increase in the number of homicides by other instruments, including physical form.

## **Measuring Armed Violence in Brazil**

### Public Health Data

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<sup>11</sup> Ministério da Saúde, Secretaria de Vigilância em Saúde. 2005. Impacto da Campanha do Desarmamento no Índice Nacional de Mortalidade por Arma de Fogo. Brasília – Brasil.

Public health information has been the principal measure of the impacts of these high levels of violence over time and of the Disarmament Statute. In spite of some limitations, public health data in Brazil is seen as a more credible source of information on violence (less subject to distortions and more apolitical) than others, for example the police, and is certainly more readily-available. The Health Ministry's Mortality Information System is the only databank capable of comparing systematized information on rates for each city in Brazil over a historical period of 25 years. Further, health systems are available online, nearly universally accessible and published in a reasonably fast period<sup>12</sup>.

The Mortality Information System (Sistema de Informação de Mortalidade, SIM) and the Hospitalization Information System (Sistema de Informação de Internação Hospitalar, SIH) are part of the DATASUS/Ministry of Health and are national in scope, with detailed information on Brazilian states and cities. Data collection, information flow and data processing are nationally standardized in the SIM and the SIH. However, the quality of information among Brazilian cities varies. There is an average delay of two years for SIM and six months for SIH for releasing data. This limits their utility in documenting current epidemiological patterns and developing prevention strategies based on this information. The SIM started in 1979, which to build a historical series over 28 years. The SIH is much more recent and records on injuries leading to hospitalization were only kept from 1998<sup>13</sup>.

Based on the World Health Organization's International Classification of Diseases (ICD), these databases contain information on the cause of death and/or hospitalization, as well as on the medium or instrument involved (poisoning, drowning, sharp or pointed object, firearms, etc).

The contextualization of the death or injury informed by the ICD-10 is limited to intent of the act (if it was homicide, suicide, or unintentional injury). There is no information on, for example, whether the homicide occurred as a result of domestic violence. This type of

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<sup>12</sup> Phebo, Luciana: "The Impact of Firearms on Health in Brazil" in Fernandes, Rubem César, et. al.: *Brazil: the Arms and the Victims* (Small Arms Survey, Viva Rio, ISER: 2005).

<sup>13</sup> [www.datasus.gov.br](http://www.datasus.gov.br)

information can only be conclusive when public security data are included – but these are the hardest to gain access to.

The ICD-10 only classifies by the caliber of guns (small or large-caliber) used in deaths or injuries. One knows, however, that other characteristics such as firepower and the trajectory of the bullet also impact on the gravity of the injury. More detailed information on the circumstances of the deaths or injuries can contribute to improving understanding of the facts. For example, unintentional firearms injuries could be the result of “stray bullets” or accidents caused by mishandling. Because “stray bullets” are a recurring problem in some urban centers, this should be introduced as a separate category in the Brazilian classification.

#### Police/ Criminal Statistics

Another important source of statistics to measure armed violence is public security data. Access to it is not easy to get and the quality and reliability of the information is much lower than the ones of the Health System.

Brazil has a national system of information on firearms, called SINARM, which is under the control of the Federal Police<sup>14</sup>. It was established in 1997. Until the end of 2003, when the Statute of Disarmament came into force, state polices had the responsibility of issuing licenses and permits to purchase and possess guns, information was sent to SINARM on a very irregular basis. With the new law, small arms control was centralized and the Federal Police was given the authority over registers and licenses. Until the moment, few states provide updated information to SINARM. To enforce the law a recent decree was passed, which says that states that do not systematically send information to SINARM will not have the right to access the National Fund for Public Security.

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<sup>14</sup> [www.sinarm.gov.br](http://www.sinarm.gov.br)

Apart from the federal level, each of the 27 Brazilian States has a State Secretariat of Public Security. These institutions, in general, assemble, monitor and analyse data produced by the two state polices: the military (preventive and combative) and the civil (investigative). The quality of the data varies from state to state. Some of them still do not have a digital database. Besides that, the clearance rate for crimes in Brazil is very low, and impunity is a major population complain.

There are advances in state polices that are worth mentioning though, such as the case of the Civil Police of Rio de Janeiro State.

In the year 2000, a databank of firearms and ammunitions seized and decommissioned was created as a result of a partnership between the Civil police and Viva Rio. This databank facilitated the organization of a system that allows for tracing firearms and ammunition from seizure to destruction. A report based on this databank released just before the Referendum, on October 3, 2005, by the Rio de Janeiro state government with information from the State Civil Police found that in Rio, most of the crime guns seized by the police were once legally-owned. A commonly-held belief in Brazil, is that guns used to commit crimes were either acquired on the illegal market or diverted from state security forces. In reality, the report found that 72% of crime guns were once legally-owned and that 65% of registered guns used in crime once belonged to civilians. It also found that guns that had once been legally-owned were used in 78% of armed theft, 67% of rapes at gunpoint, 58% of gun homicides, 32% of kidnappings at gunpoint.<sup>15</sup>

This example shows the importance of information and of data systems to provide a clear understand of the scene as it is, and to correctly inform public policies and campaigns.

### **Conclusion / Recommendations**

As demonstrated in this rapid assessment of the armed violence scenario in Brazil, the complexity and intensity of the phenomena, call for innovative and integrated policies. A

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<sup>15</sup> Rio de Janeiro Public Security Secretariat (October 2005).

comprehensive approach to control and reduce armed violence in Brazil, needs simultaneous actions that address the agents, the instruments and the institutions involved in the violence spiral. National frameworks should encompass diverse areas with public policies that range from gun control to police reform, which need to go hand in hand with social programs that include opportunities for the youth, such as accelerated schooling and job training, combined with urban policies that improve the quality of life for residents of poor areas.

National Armed Violence Reduction Frameworks such as the Disarmament Statute and the new National Program for Public Security and Citizenship (PRONASCI) show that the Brazilian Government is aware of the complex nature of armed violence and is taking appropriate measures to confront the problem. PRONASCI is the first Brazilian National Framework that integrates development and security policies. One key issue though is to allow for continuity of successful public policies, specially when changes of government occur. At the moment, NGO's are advocating for the gun buy-back campaign to happen once a year at a pre-set month. This measure, among several others should be incorporated by PRONASCI.

Needless to say that every national framework and public policy should be guided by information based on good data collection, monitoring and impact evaluation, therefore data collection has to be improved and standardized throughout the country. An effort to standardize and improve criminal/police information and other sources of data, and to integrate information from different sources such as from the public health and the criminal/police systems is crucial.

In order to achieve such aims, cooperation among federal, state, municipal governments and civil society is needed. Armed violence reduction is a challenge that requires long term commitment and cooperation at all levels of society and government.

In the last years, government and civil society interventions have been able to start breaking the violence cycle. Much has to be done yet, but a better understanding of the

complexity of the problem, the key partnerships between civil society and governments, and the lessons already learned, have been pointing at a more optimistic future prospect. Constant monitoring and evaluation of these interventions will allow the Brazilians to keep the right track in confronting armed violence.

## End Notes

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<sup>i</sup> Brazil has a population of approximately 180 million people. In 2006 the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was of USD 1,067 billion with a per capita income of USD 5,716.67. Despite its large economy, Brazil is one of the most unequal countries in terms of income distribution in the world, with a Gini Index of 0.61 for 2005. The upper class, constituted of 9,28% of the population, receives 41,47% of the Brazilian income. While the poorest 7,73% receives only 0,78%.

Nevertheless it is significant to take into account recent researches that show a conjunctural decrease of inequality by an income increase of the poor in Brazil despite the modest overall economic growth. By a new methodology (Kakwani, N., Neri, M., Son, H., 2006) capable of measuring a “pro-poor growth” it is possible to see that during the 2003-2004 period the *per capita* income growth reached 14,1% between the poorest, while the general *per capita* income growth stayed at 3,56%. This figures represent a 10,55% inequality reduction mostly owed to redistributive national policies.