

@CHAPTER = BRAZIL

In 1989, Brazil continued to experience serious human rights violations. In the countryside, violence resulting from land conflicts claimed lives of peasants, union organizers and lawyers. Peasant leaders in particular were singled out for murder and harassment, and in at least two documented cases they were tortured by police. There have also been serious abuses against Indians, such as expulsions from their lands by landowners and gold miners, pollution of Indian waters by gold prospectors, and killings. These abuses have been particularly severe in areas controlled by the military, where Indians have been deprived of outside help, including medical assistance, and where the ability to monitor is limited.

Brazilian police have continued to use torture in interrogating criminal suspects. In February, seven suspects were tortured to death by police in Rondonopolis, Mato Grosso state. Also in February, 18 inmates suffocated to death in a punishment cell in a Sao Paulo police jail.

Allegations that the police are involved in organized crime led to the recent murder of two journalists. One, in Vitória, Espirito Santo state, published an article containing such allegations in July and was murdered a few days later. The other was killed in Manaus, Amazonas state, in the last days of 1988, after he had made similar discoveries.

@PAGE = Perpetrators of most of the human rights violations in Brazil routinely enjoy almost total impunity. The Brazilian government has been responsible for tolerating violence in the countryside, often at the hands of private militias paid for by large landowners, and for not taking decisive steps to reform the ineffectual and corrupt judicial system. The government has also failed to curtail human rights abuses by the police.

During all of 1989, the Bush administration made no public pronouncements on human rights in Brazil. It is astonishing and disturbing that the administration seems to lack a human rights policy with respect to the largest Latin American country, and one of the most violent, particularly given the troublesome and potentially explosive human rights situation. We urge the administration to outline such a policy immediately, and to make it an important part of its agenda with the new Brazilian government.