Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests (RIR) respond to focused Requests for Information that are submitted to the Research Directorate in the course of the refugee protection determination process. The database contains a seven-year archive of English and French RIRs. Earlier RIRs may be found on the UNHCR's Refworld website. Please note that some RIRs have attachments which are not electronically accessible. To obtain a PDF copy of an RIR attachment, please email the Knowledge and Information Management Unit.

BRA105251.E

Brazil: the Red Command criminal organization (Comando Vermelho, CV), including its activities and areas of operation, membership and structure, power, networks, political connections and resources; state protection available for victims of crimes committed by the Red Command.

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1. Red Command

1.1 Overview

According to sources, the Red Command was established during the 1970s in a Rio de Janeiro prison and was the result of an alliance between criminals and radical leftists (Grillo 27 Aug. 2014; The New Yorker 5 Oct. 2009; InSight Crime [29 Sept. 2014]). Sources describe the Red Command as "Brazil's oldest criminal group" (ibid.); one of Brazil's "largest" organized criminal groups (ISSAT 2 Feb. 2015); the "largest" criminal organization in Rio (The Irish Times 2 Apr. 2014); and one of Brazil's "most powerful drug-trafficking gangs" (Jane's Intelligence Review 11 Apr. 2013).

1.2 Activities and Areas of Operation

Sources state that the Red Command is based in the favelas [slums] of Rio de Janeiro (Grillo 27 Aug. 2014; Jane's Intelligence Review 31 Aug. 2011). According to sources, they are involved in the following criminal activities:

- drug trafficking (ISSAT 2 Feb. 2015; Jane's Intelligence Review 31 Aug. 2011; University of Pittsburgh n.d.a);
- arms trafficking (ibid.; ISSAT 2 Feb. 2015);
- robbery (ibid.; Jane's Intelligence Review 31 Aug. 2011);
- kidnapping (ibid.; ISSAT 2 Feb. 2015; University of Pittsburgh n.d.a); and

Sources also indicate that the Red Command carries out "executions" in the areas that it controls (Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung June 2014, 1; Grillo 27 Aug. 2014), against alleged crimes such as theft or rape (ibid.).

Sources state that the Red Command provides some services to the favela communities in order to secure their support (University of Pittsburgh n.d.a; Grillo 27 Aug. 2014). Services include providing water, medicine (ibid.; University of Pittsburgh n.d.a), cooking oil and payment for hospital stays or funeral arrangements (ibid.).

1.3 Membership and Structure
According to *Jane's Intelligence Review*, while accurate membership numbers for the Red Command are "impossible" to provide, 2011 Federal Police intelligence reports from the country reportedly state that membership was estimated at approximately 20,000 members, possibly a third of whom are incarcerated (31 Aug. 2011). A report published by the Matthew B. Ridgway Center for International Security Studies at the University of Pittsburgh, which aims to "produce original and impartial analysis that informs policymakers who must confront diverse challenges to state and human security" (University of Pittsburgh n.d.c), states that Red Command membership is "very large" and members number in the "thousands" (ibid. n.d.b).

Sources describe the structure of the Red Command as "decentralised" and "an alliance of semi-autonomous local gangs" that operate under "*donos*" (bosses) (*Jane's Intelligence Review* 31 Aug. 2011); loosely organized (University of Pittsburgh n.d.a); and "cell-like" (Grillo 27 Aug. 2014). According to the Ridgway Center, organization is more hierarchical and structured at the favela-level (University of Pittsburgh n.d.a).

Sources describe Luiz Fernando da Costa (alias Fernandinho Beira-Mar [Fernandinho Beira-Mar]), who is currently in prison, as a central figure within the Red Command (*Jane's Intelligence Review* 31 Aug. 2011; InSight Crime [29 Sept. 2014]). InSight Crime, a foundation that specializes in researching organized crime in Latin America and the Caribbean (ibid. n.d.b), further states that Isaias da Costa Rodrigues (alias Isaias do Borel) is also a "prominent boss," who was released from prison in 2012 after serving more than 20 years (ibid. [29 Sept. 2014]).

### 1.4 Power, Networks, Political Connections and Resources

According to InSight Crime, in 2005, the Red Command controlled "more than half of Rio de Janeiro's most violent areas"; this figure fell to under 40 percent in 2008 (InSightCrime [29 Sept. 2014]). Some sources indicate that the influence of the Red Command has declined recently as a result of the Police Pacification Unit (UPP) that operate in some of the favelas (ibid.; ISSAT 2 Feb. 2015). Other sources note, however, that the pacification operations resulted in criminal organizations moving into other favelas (Daily Mail 16 June 2013; Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung June 2014, 2; Grillo 27 Aug. 2014), including the Red Command (ibid.).

Sources also report that the Red Command has lost power due to the rising power of other gangs (University of Pittsburgh n.d.a; InSight Crime [29 Sept. 2014]), including rival gangs "such as Amigos dos Amigos" (ADA, Friends of Friends) [a "breakaway faction" of the Red Command (University of Pittsburgh n.d.a). According to the Ridgway Center, organization is more hierarchical and structured at the favela-level (University of Pittsburgh n.d.a).

In 2011, *Jane's Intelligence Review* estimated that the Red Command was "still probably" the dominant gang in "up to 100" favelas across Rio de Janeiro (31 Aug. 2011). According to an article by Latin American journalist Ioan Grillo in the *CTC Sentinel*, a monthly "independent publication" published by the US Military Academy at West Point (USMA)'s Center for Combating Terrorism (CTC) (CTC n.d.), the control of the Red Command in the Antares favela "remains intact and blatant" (Grillo 27 Aug. 2014).

Sources report that the Red Command has a presence in other parts of the country besides Rio de Janeiro (University of Pittsburgh n.d.a; InSight Crime [29 Sept. 2014]), including in the city of Sao Paulo (ibid.). Sources state that the Red Command has connections with Sao Paulo-based criminal organization Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC, First Command of the Capital) (University of Pittsburgh n.d.a; CFR 26 Sept. 2006; InSight Crime [29 Sept. 2014]). InSight Crime describes the PCC as "the largest and best-organized criminal organization in Brazil" that has a presence in "two-thirds of the country's states" (ibid. n.d.a). According to sources, in 2012, the PCC was suspected of being responsible for murdering a larger number of off and on-duty police in Sao Paulo (*The New York Times* 2 Oct. 2012; CNN 25 Nov. 2012; *The Guardian* 11 Nov. 2012). The numbers reportedly ranged from 70 (*The New York Times* 2 Oct. 2012) to "nearly 100" (CNN 25 Nov. 2012).

According to sources, internationally, the Red Command also has connections in the following countries:

- Paraguay (ISSAT 2 Feb. 2015; University of Pittsburgh n.d.a; InSight Crime [29 Sept. 2014]);
- Bolivia (ibid.; ISSAT 2 Feb. 2015; *Jane's Intelligence Review* 31 Aug. 2011);
- Colombia (University of Pittsburgh n.d.a; *Jane's Intelligence Review* 31 Aug. 2011), including with Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) (ibid.); (InSight Crime [29 Sept. 2014]);
- Peru (*Jane's Intelligence Review* 31 Aug. 2011; University of Pittsburgh n.d.a); and
- Suriname (ibid.).

Information on the Red Command's political connections could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The Ridgway Center reports that the Red Command has access to large caliber firearms (University of Pittsburgh n.d.a). According to a 2009 investigative article by *The New Yorker* magazine, members of criminal
organizations in Rio de Janeiro were "caught with military-issue machine guns and anti-aircraft weapons" (The New Yorker 5 Oct. 2009). According to Grillo, the Red Command is able to buy weapons and employ "thousands of gunmen" from drug trafficking funds (27 Aug. 2014).

2. State Protection for Victims of Red Command

2.1 Witness Protection Program

In a 2014 letter to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the independence of judges and lawyers in Brazil, the Permanent Mission of Brazil to the UN in Geneva stated that the country's witness protection program provides the following protection measures, among others:

- home security, including control over telecommunications and escorting to and from home;
- temporary stay at a place compatible with the protection required;
- preservation of identity, image and personal data;
- monthly financial aid, if the person under protection is unable to perform regular work or if he or she has no source of income;
- social, medical and psychological care and assistance. (Brazil 15 July 2014)

Information on persons with access to the program, the scope and available resources of the program, as well as the number of persons protected under the witness protection program could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. For further information on the witness protection program, including history and structure, see Response to Information Request BRA104224.

2.2 Pacification Program

According to sources, authorities in Rio de Janeiro began a pacification program in 2008 (ISSAT 2 Feb. 2015; Grillo 27 Aug. 2014; The Irish Times 2 Apr. 2014). Sources state that the aim of the program is to drive criminal organizations out of the targeted favelas and then establish a permanent police presence through the use of Police Pacification Units (UPP) [community police stations (ibid.)] (ibid.; Grillo 27 Aug. 2014; Jane’s Intelligence Review 11 Apr. 2013). According to sources, in 2010, government forces carried out an attack on the Complexo do Alemão area [a group of 13 favelas (ibid.)], the headquarters of the Red Command (ibid.; AFP 28 Nov. 2010).

Sources report a reduction in violence in the areas where UPPs have been established (Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung June 2014, 2; The Irish Times 2 Apr. 2014). Sources report that as of 2014, the number of UPP units that have been established in Rio de Janeiro was 38 (ibid.) or 39 (Grillo 27 Aug. 2014). Grillo reports that the UPPs serve "hundreds of thousands of residents in more than 100 of about 600 favelas in the metropolitan area," however, "[t]he majority of the 1.7 million favela dwellers in Rio still live in unpacified areas" (ibid.). According to Jane’s Intelligence Review, "[m]ost UPP outposts" have been established in "favelas in the more prosperous southern part of the city or in close proximity to sporting venues and infrastructure hubs" (11 Apr. 2013). Grillo similarly reports that pacified areas encompass "the largest favelas and almost all the slums near the city center where tourists might venture" (27 Aug. 2014).

Sources report that criminal organizations launched attacks against UPPs in 2014 (Reuters 21 Mar. 2014; Jane’s Intelligence Review Dec. 2014). Reuters reported in March 2014 that violence had been increasing in the slums that had been "pacified" and drug traffickers were attempting to reclaim "their lost territory" (21 Mar. 2014). According to Jane’s Intelligence Review, criminal groups staged a "counter-attack" against UPPs, resulting in the death of eight police officers, as of November 2014 (Dec. 2014). The same source reports that in October 2014, the Amigos dos Amigos directly attacked military and police units (ibid.). Citing a Red Command member in the Antares favela, Grillo reports that Red Command members "ambush police if they enter the favela," and fire on them from higher ground like hills or rooftops (27 Aug. 2014).

Sources indicate that police have been accused of corruption and working with criminal organizations (BBC 4 Dec. 2012; Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung June 2014, 3; ISSAT 2 Feb. 2015), including "working with local drug traffickers and running arms trafficking networks" (ibid.). In 2012, BBC reported that 60 police officers were arrested for taking bribes, ignoring criminal activity and supplying weapons to criminal organizations (4 Dec. 2012). The same source reported that 11 Red Command drug dealers were also arrested (ibid.).

For information on organized crime and resources available to victims of organized crime in general, including police effectiveness, see Response to Information Request BRA104224.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References


### Additional Sources Consulted

**Oral sources:** The following were unable to provide information for this Response: Conectas Human Rights; Igarapé Institute.

Attempts to contact the following were unsuccessful within the time constraints of this Response: Brazil – Embassy in Ottawa; Director, King's Brazil Institute, King's College London; General Penha Brazil Parachutist’s Instruction Center; Laboratory for the Analyses of Violence, State University of Rio de Janeiro; Politics and Security in Latin America; Research Associate, International Institute for Strategic Studies.

**Internet sites, including:** Amnesty International; Brazilian Studies Association; Canadian Broadcasting Corporation; Central News Network; Conectas Human Rights; ecoi.net; Factiva; Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública; Freedom House; Huffington Post; Human Rights Watch; Igarapé Institute; The Independent; Institute for War & Peace Reporting; InterAmerican Security Watch; Justiça Global Brasil; MarcoPress; Organization of American States; Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty; The Rio Times; The Santiago Times; United Nations – Office on Drugs and Crime, Refworld; United States – Department of State; The Wall Street Journal.

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