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Brazil: Update to BRA33317.E of 6 December 1999 on state protection against drug gangs in Brazil, particularly in and around Rio de Janeiro (2000 to April 2003)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

Several sources indicate that *favelas* (shantytowns) in Rio de Janeiro are controlled by drug gangs (*Courrier international* 7 Oct. 2002; *Brazzil* Oct. 2002; Knight Ridder 4 Feb. 2003; EFE News Service 9 Apr. 2000). According to the sources consulted, drug gangs provide entertainment, playgrounds, medicine and food to *favela* residents (*Washington Post* 8 July 2001; *ibid* 19 Sept. 2002). Furthermore, another source indicated that these gangs offer [translation] "parallel security" to the residents: [translation] "armed to the teeth, they act like police and reduce petty crime" (*Courrier international* 7 Oct. 2002). This phenomenon, once unique to *favelas*, seems to be spreading to other middle-class neighbourhoods in the city (*ibid.*; *New York Times* 29 June 2002; *Washington Post* 15 Dec. 2002).

Drug gangs have become "a recognised socio-political force" at the *favela* level (Dowdney 2002, 38). They ensure that *favela* residents have access to certain services, while establishing rules and codes of behaviour that serve both their interests and those of the community (*ibid.*, 39). Any breach of these rules carries punitive action (*ibid.*). The result is a system of "forced reciprocity" (*ibid.*, 40).

On the issue of state protection against drug gangs, André Fernandes, president of the residents' association of Morro Dona Marta in the southern district of Rio, said that [translation] "[f]avela residents equate the official police with cruelty and extortion. Favela residents do not support drug traffickers, but they do feel a little safer when they are around" (*Courrier international* 7 Oct. 2002). Carolina Berard, a Brazilian journalist, wrote that the people of Brazil, and more specifically the *favela* residents, felt a "lack of confidence" in the police force (*Brazzil* Oct. 2002).

Country Reports 2002 indicated that a number of families in the *favelas* (approximately 33 per week) were forced out of their homes during the year for refusing to cooperate with drug gangs (*Country Reports 2002* 31 Mar. 2003, Sec. 1.f.). The same source reported that Brazilian police failed to provide them with the protection they needed to remain in their homes (*ibid.*). In the same vein, *Country Reports 2002* noted that police failed to protect a journalist who had received repeated death threats after her series of investigative reports on drug trafficking in *favelas* (*ibid.*, Sec. 2.a.). The *Chicago Tribune* stated that "[d]rug traffickers have long turned slum neighborhoods in Rio into dangerous areas for police who enter them only in military-style operations. Gangs in those communities often outnumber and outgun the police" (12 Jan. 2003). Another source added that police raids on *favelas* are usually violent, that they often result in the death of innocent *favela* residents, and that police corruption is commonplace (Dowdney 2002, 7).

Brazilian authorities have repeatedly revamped security plans in an attempt to curb the increasing crime and violence in the country (EFE News Service 14 Mar. 2003), and put in place various anti-drug strategies during the 2000-2002 period, such as a new federal anti-drug law and a federal drug court (*International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2002* 1 Mar. 2003; *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2001* 1

Mar. 2002; *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2000* 2001). For more information on the revamped strategies, see the section on Brazil in the *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2002* at the following Internet address: <<http://www.state.gov/g/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2002/html/17944.htm>>.

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 to refugee status or asylum. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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IRB Databases

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