RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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Several sources indicate that favelas (shantytowns) in Rio de Janeiro are controlled by drug gangs (Courrier international 7 Oct. 2002; Brazil 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 (Brazil 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

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.

References


Additional Sources Consulted

IRB Databases

Internet sites, including:

Amnesty International

Human Rights Watch
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