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05 May 2003

BRA41405.FE

Brazil: Update to BRA33316.E of 3 December 1999 on the Red Command (Comando Vermelho) gang; its organization and activities, particularly in Rio de Janeiro (2000-2003)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

The Red Command or Red Commando (Comando Vermelho) is Brazil's most powerful drug gang (About.com 21 Oct. 2002; *Libération* 12 June 2002; Dowdney 2002, 170). The Red Command's territorial base territory is the *favelas*, or shantytowns, of Rio de Janeiro (*ibid.*, 22; About.com 21 Oct. 2002; *Chicago Tribune* 2 Feb. 2003). On one hand, *favelas* give the Red Command a strategic geographical position that allows it to control comings and goings and, on the other hand, they provide them with the necessary manpower for selling drugs (Dowdney 2002, 22). The presence of military-style *quadrilhas* in the streets and the graffiti markings of the Red Command initials "CV" on buildings in a *favela* indicate that a territory is under the gang's rule (*ibid.*, 33; *Chicago Tribune* 2 Feb. 2003). Drug gangs like the Red Command control *favelas* using paramilitary-style techniques (Dowdney 2003, 19).

Several sources indicated that the Red Command's main activity is trafficking drugs (About.com 21 Oct. 2002; *Chicago Tribune* 2 Feb. 2003; *Latinamerica Press* 21 Oct. 2002; *Washington Post* 19 Sept. 2002) like marijuana and cocaine (Dowdney 2002, 6; *Courrier international* 4-10 July 2002). One of these sources reported that the Red Command controls 90 per cent of cocaine trafficking in Rio de Janeiro (*ibid.*). The organization is also involved in roadblocks, robbery and kidnappings (About.com 21 Oct. 2002).

The organizational structure of the Red Command is described as originating as "a network of affiliated independent actors rather than a strictly hierarchical organisation with a single head figure" (Dowdney 2002, 22). Each *dono*, or leader, manages the activities of a Red Command faction within a given community (*ibid.*). Two of the most powerful Red Command *donos*, Luiz Fernando Da Costa (also known as Fernandinho Beira-Mar and Seaside Freddy) and Elias Maluco, are currently serving time in prison (*ibid.*, 31; Agence France-Presse 30 Sept. 2002). A prison-based structure that centralized power within the organization gave rise to the positions of president and vice-president of the Red Command-positions that were filled by incarcerated *donos* who "rule prison life, settle internal faction disputes that occur outside of prison and make the final decision on any matters of mutual interest for faction affiliates" (Dowdney 2002, 32). Outside prison, one *dono* is designated as the liaison between the Red Command *donos* who are not incarcerated and those serving jail time (*ibid.*). An former drug trafficker and member of the Red Command described the organization as "a cross between a workers co-operative and a state power" (*ibid.*).

According to Luke Dowdney, a strict hierarchical and militarized structure controls the operation of drug gangs in the *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro (*ibid.*, 33). In descending order, the hierarchy consists of the leader (*dono*); the *dono*'s general manager in the *favela* (*gerente geral*); three sub-managers who are responsible for the sale of marijuana (*gerente de preto*), the sale of cocaine (*gerente de branco*), and overseeing the 'soldiers' (*gerente de soldados*); managers responsible for the sale of both marijuana and cocaine from their specific sales points (*gerente de boca*); security 'soldiers' (*soldado*); personal armed security guards who act as the *dono*'s and *gerente geral*'s right-hand men (*fiel*); drug dealers (*vapor*); look-outs (*olheiros*); and

drug packagers (*endolador*) (ibid., 33-35). Some of these positions are open to children (ibid., 8). The same source also indicated that drug gangs in Rio de Janeiro employ 10,000 of the city's residents (ibid., 6). For more detailed information on the organizational structure of drug gangs, see *Child Combatants in Organised Armed Violence: A Study of Children and Adolescents Involved in Territorial Drug Faction Disputes in Rio de Janeiro* at the following Internet address: <<http://www.iansa.org/documents/2002/childrenoav.pdf>>. The author of this report, Luke Dowdney, is a researcher at Viva Rio (WCC 9 Sept. 2002), a non-governmental non-profit organization fighting for peace and development in the *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro (Viva Rio n.d.).

In the last two years, Red Command members are reported to have murdered a Brazilian journalist who was investigating the gang's activities in June 2002 (About.com 21 Oct. 2002; *Libération* 12 June 2002), and to have paralysed Rio de Janeiro on several occasions (in September 2002 and in February 2003, in particular) using various tactics, such as shutting down businesses and schools, burning buses, assaulting police stations and bombing middle-class neighbourhoods (About.com 21 Oct. 2002; *The Guardian* 26 Feb. 2003; EFE News Service 5 Mar. 2003; Agence France-Presse 30 Sept. 2002; ibid. 5 Oct. 2002; *Latinamerica Press* 12 Mar. 2003; *The Narco News Bulletin* 5 Mar. 2003; *The Washington Post* 28 Feb. 2003). The last demonstration of this sort took place just before Rio de Janeiro's Carnival in February 2003 (ibid.; *The Guardian* 26 Feb. 2003; EFE News Service 5 Mar. 2003; *Latinamerica Press* 12 Mar. 2003). Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva deployed thousands of army troops in the city to fight this wave of violence (EFE News Service 5 Mar. 2003; *The Narco News Bulletin* 5 Mar. 2003; *Washington Post* 28 Feb. 2003). Some of the sources consulted linked the Red Command to other criminal organizations like Brazil's First Commando of the Capital (Primeiro comando da capital PCC) (*Courrier international* 4-10 July 2002; EFE News Service 22 Feb. 2001) and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia (FARC) (*Le Monde* 14 Sept. 2002).

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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Additional Sources Consulted

IRB Databases

Internet sites, including:

Amnesty International

BBC News

Centre for Geopolitical Drug Studies

Human Rights Watch

Observatoire géopolitique des drogues

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

WNC

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