

Date _____

Ambassador Nestor Forster Jr.
Embassy of Brazil
3006 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20008

Dear Ambassador:

I am writing to you to express my grave concern at the shocking loss of life that occurred at the hands of police officers during a raid on the community of Jacarezinho in Rio de Janeiro on the morning of May 6, 2021. After the more than 200 police officers accompanied by armored vehicles and a helicopter completed their search of the neighborhood, 28 people lay dead. This makes it the bloodiest raid in the history of Rio de Janeiro.

Not only was the raid another tragic example of the use of excessive police force in Rio de Janeiro, it was illegal. The Brazilian Supreme Court delivered a ruling last year prohibiting police raids in Rio de Janeiro's low-income neighborhoods except in "absolutely exceptional cases". The reason that the police gave for invading Jacarezinho was to apprehend 21 low-level gang members suspected of drug-dealing. This cannot qualify as exceptional and therefore the subsequent police massacre was both unnecessary and unconstitutional. To make matters worse, there are reports that the killings were in response to the murder of a police officer earlier that day, making it a blatant case of unequal and unjust retribution.

The police recorded that most victims of the raid were black. Black Brazilians are almost three times more likely to be killed by police than white Brazilians according to Human Rights Watch. Also, although Rio de Janeiro has a population of only 16 million, police there fatally shot 1,814 people in 2019, 80% more than police killed in all of the United States. The problem of police violence aimed at Black Brazilians is so grave that the United Nations singled the country out in a report urging nations to prevent systemic racism against people of African descent.

I am asking your government to work with the Attorney General of Rio de Janeiro, Luciano Mattos, and the governor, Cláudio Castro, to establish a well-resourced unit of prosecutors dedicated to developing and enforcing police protocols to prevent abuses, as well as investigating and prosecuting those police officers involved in or suspected of having participated in abuses. The prosecutors should follow international standards, ensuring the investigation is entrusted to an independent body, distinct from the police force involved in the incident. In addition, they should only be assisted by police, criminalistic and administrative personnel that are unrelated to the law enforcement agency to which the possible perpetrator or perpetrators belong. I urge you to make ending police impunity and unlawful police killings a priority within your government.

Yours sincerely,

Address: _____