

Briefing Series on Accountability

Killings by Police in Brazil: Not a Game

Thursday, June 9, 2016

3:30 – 4:30 PM

Capitol Visitors Center Congressional Meeting Room South

Opening Remarks

Good afternoon and welcome to today's Commission briefing on unlawful police killings in Brazil. I thank our panelists, two of whom traveled to Washington to be with us this afternoon, for taking the time to educate us on this important issue.

I especially welcome Liz Martin, whose nephew, Joseph Martin, was unarmed when he was shot and killed by an off-duty policeman on May 25, 2007, in front of a nightclub in Rio, where he was celebrating his 30th birthday. I am saddened that the problem of police killings persists in Brazil, but honored to have Ms. Martin with us here today

Brazil is the largest country in Latin America and a growing power in the western hemisphere. Almost one year ago today, President Obama, in a joint press conference with then-President Dilma Rouseff at the White House, described Brazil as a "major global player" and "indispensable partner" on a variety of important issues.

But since that optimistic White House meeting, Brazil's challenges on several important fronts have increased greatly. The Brazilian economy is in recession, and the suspension and impeachment of President Rouseff for allegedly violating budget accounting rules during her 2014 re-election campaign has generated a major political crisis. Most recently, two of Interim President Michel Temer's top ministers have been forced to resign after leaked recordings suggested they conspired to derail ongoing corruption investigations.

However, what brings us here today is not the country's current economic or political crisis, but another crisis that receives less international attention: police killings.

The number of killings by police in Brazil, especially the cities of Rio and Sao Paulo, has been very high for many years, and is increasing. According to Human Rights Watch's 2016 World Report, Brazil is plagued by chronic human rights abuses, including unlawful police killings. According to a 2015 report by Amnesty International, "You Killed My Son," Brazil has the highest number of homicides in the world, and far too many of these killings are at the hands

of the military police who are charged with maintaining law and order. Often these police killings are categorized as “resistance followed by death,” and not investigated further -- a culture of impunity surrounds these killings. Human rights groups report that most of the killings by police are of young, black men in marginalized areas and favelas.

With the start of the 2016 Olympics due to start in Rio in less than two months, public security in Brazil is under heightened scrutiny. Authorities have recently announced the deployment of 65,000 police officers and 20,000 military troops to guard the Olympics. When the World Cup was held in Brazil in 2014, there were many reports of human rights abuses. During the Olympics, the world will be watching, and looking for improvements.

I look forward to hearing from our distinguished panelists, and in particular, I am interested in their recommendations as to what the U.S. government and Congress can do about police violence in Brazil as we head into the Olympics. Thank you again for your presence, and I turn the mic over to Peter J. Meyer, Analyst in Latin American Affairs at the Congressional Research Service, who will moderate today’s discussion.