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John Neagle

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Rio De Janeiro, Brazil: Bishops Denounce Killings In Poor Neighborhoods By Police & Hired Guns

by John Neagle

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In statements to AFP on Sept. 13, Bishop Mauro Morelli said policemen and hired guns of businesspersons are murdering people in Rio de Janeiro's low-income neighborhoods to reduce the crime rate. More than 1,000 people were murdered in the first six months of 1989 in the impoverished Baixada Fulminense area which houses 3 million people, said the bishop. Morelli is bishop of Duque de Caixas, one of the Baixada Fulminense's four municipalities. According to Morelli, "extermination groups" were responsible for the killings. Most victims, he said, were suspected criminals. He added, "The community is adopting the ideology that the needy must be exterminated." Waldir Calheiros, bishop of Volta Redonda, told AFP that 89 people had been killed in the first six months of the year in his section where 300,000 people live. Both bishops complained of the appalling living conditions in the neediest sections of Rio de Janeiro and the way in which wealth was unequally distributed in Brazil.

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