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Brazil: Murder Of Street Children

by Erika Harding

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According to a report issued Feb. 26 by a congressional investigation commission, between 1988 and 1990, 4,611 children and youths were killed by death squads. Eighty-two percent of the victims were black, 23% were female, and the majority were between 15 and 17 years of age. The commission said victims were routinely tortured, their eyes gouged out, and their bodies burned. The report named 128 people accused of participating in such "exterminations," including police officers, businesspeople, and owners of security services companies. Deputy Rita Camata, head of the commission, said the nine-month investigation revealed "great neglect by the president's office, state and municipal governments." State government officials were often uncooperative with investigators, refusing to submit documents and statistics on killings. Police regularly destroyed evidence requested by investigators. Camata said President Fernando Collor de Mello's staff pressured her to tone down the report's critical language and to exclude certain data. The report recommends that the Federal Police conduct extensive investigations into the activities of private security companies. Companies operating under "irregular" circumstances should be shut down, according to the commission. The number of private security guards and related employees in Brazil is estimated at 200,000. The report also proposes legal reforms on child labor, and children's rights. The commission report must now be submitted for approval via a floor vote in both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. (Sources: Agence France-Presse, 02/27/92; Spanish news service EFE, 02/27/92, 03/02/92; Associated Press, 03/02/92)