Human Rights In Brazil Essay, Research Paper

The population in Brazil consists of 144 million people.

Brazil is one of the fastest-growing nations in the Western

Hemisphere. Its population is increasing at the rate of about 2% a

year. The constitution of Brazil gives the president tremendous

powers. For example, the president may intervene in affairs of

Brazil’s states. The chief executive may even create new states from

existing ones.

Brazil has three main ethnic groups-whites, blacks, and people

of mixed ancestry. Most of the whites are from Europe. According to

the Brazilian government whites make up about 60% of the nation’s

population, and people of mixed races form about 30%. However, the

government of Brazil counts many lightskinned people of mixed ancestry

as white. Brazil’s ethnic groups generally get along well with one

another. Racial discrimination in Brazil if far less widespread than

that in many other countries with people of several races. But

Brazilians of European descent have had better educational

opportunities. As a result, they hold most of the higher jobs in

government and industry. Many of the non-Europeans, particularly

blacks, have excelled in the arts, entertainment and sports.

Brazil’s prison system system is in crisis. Four years ago, in

its 1990 urban violence report Amnesty International described the

prisons as being at breaking point, holding double their official

capacity in “inhuman” conditions. Four years later the situation

has not improved. In some respects, it has deteriorated. Overcrowding,

lack of medical and legal assistance, torture and ill-treatment of

inmates and harassment of visitors are endemic. A frightening and

rising proportion of prisoners carry the HIV virus. In the Women’s

Prison of Soo Paulom, around 33% of the inmates are infected with the

virus, while in the male prison the figure reaches 27% of the prison

population. A study published in 1994 shows that the majority of

prisoners are yourn, poor, and black.

A group of inmates in the Desembargador Vidal Pessoa Central

Prison of Manaus, Amazonas held a peaceful protest against conditions

in es called in military police shock-troops. They reportedly beat the

inmates, who had taken refuge in their cells, with batons, as well as

hitting and kicking them. Subsequently they locked the inmates in

their cells and threw tear gas grenades in after them.

For prisoners to complain to officials about their treatment

takes enormous courage. In Recife, Pernambuco state, on 11 May

1993, prisoners told a visiting delegation in the Barreto Campelo

Prison of the brutality they faced. The prisoners reported incidents

of torture and named the alleged torturers, even though they were

in the same room. The inmates expressed their fears of reprisals from

the prison staff. Some of them told the delegates that the director of

the prison had threatened them with severe punishment if they dared to

speak out. The torture they described included beatings, near

drowning, death threats and electric shocks.

In his report on the visit to Recife, one of the delegates,

the President of the National Council for Penal and Prison Policy,

noted that despite persistent reports in the local press about

ill-treatment in prisons in Pernambuco, the Judge of Penal Sentences

and the Secretary of Justice for Pernambuco claimed to have no

official knowledge of the prisoners’ complaints. He asked the state

authorities to investigate the prisoners’ allegations, but no

information has emerged about any investigation.

Two incidents involving prisoners with AIDS were reported in

S?o Paulo in 1994. On 27 March, a woman prisoner who was in the final

stages of AIDS in the Central Hospital of the Penitentiary System, was

reportedly beaten by a prison warden. The woman, named Leci Nazareth

da Silva, who was in great pain, was calling for the assistance of a

nurse when, just after midnight, a warden came to her cell, shouted at

her to shut up, and hit her in the face. According to the testimonies

of other women inmates, after the incident Leci Nazareth da Silva’s

mouth and lips were swollen and she was bleeding. The warden

reportedly threatened the other inmates with reprisals if they dared

to report the incident.

On 31 March 1994, Jose['] Roberto dos Santos, also an AIDS

sufferer, was severely beaten in the Casa de Detenc[,]?o, in S?o

Paulo. According to his written testimony, he was verbally insulted

and physically abused by a prison warden in an argument. When he

reported the incident to a prison official, the official insulted him

again and beat him with an iron bar. The prison officer then ordered

Jose['] Roberto dos Santos to be taken to a senior official’s office

in another part of the prison, where he was met by a group of about 13

prison wardens who punched him, beat him with iron bars and kicked

him. As a result, he began to cough up blood and was forced to wipe

the blood from the floor with his own hands. On 1 April, a prison

chaplain visited him in the infirmary and saw that Jose['] Roberto dos

Santos had bruises on his chest, back and upper limbs. He had a

swelling on his right hand side above the kidney and wounds on both

legs. Amnesty International knows of no action taken against those

responsible.

Brazilians are now pushing for a profound, ethical reform of

their political system. The peaceful and demorcatic presidential

impeachment in 1992 was followed by a thorough congressional

investigation of a vast budget corruption scandel affecting several

members of the Brrazilian Congress. As a result, several Congressmen

were unseated on the grounds of “unetheical behavior,” reaffirming the

stance that Brazilians want a corruption-free political environment.

In a related development, Brazilian elevtoral legislation was updated

and imporved with significant revisions made in the areas of

disclosure of political contributors and in accountability. The 1994

general elections were carried out in a climate of democratic freedom

and high civic expectations and the outcome serves to reinforce the

strength of democracy in Brazil.

As in other democratic societies, there is an almost permanent

political debate in Brazil about how best to deal with the country’s

social and economic challenges. Areas of special concern are income

distribution, fiscal and social securtiy reform, and economic

modernization. Finding solutions to these festering problems is not

easy. It will require the elimination of the remnants of old political

structures inherited from less democratic periods in Brazilian

history. President Itamar Franco, who was completed his two-year term

with an 86% approval rating from his fellow citizens, and President

Fernando Henrique Cardoso have both pledged and worked hard to ensure

the modernization of Brazil’s political system.

According to the Institute for Applied Economic Research ant

the Ministry of Planning, one quarter of the 60 million Brazilians

aged 18 and younger-15 million children and adolescents-live below the

poverty line in family units with a per capita monthly income of US

$18.00 or less. One third of these youths do not attend school, even

in the age group (7-14) for which school is mandatory. Roughly two

million children aged 10-14 work, which is forbidden by law. An

estimated 200,000 to 700,000 youth either live on the streets or spend

their days there. More that threee million children live in households

headed by women. In recent years, this sad picture has prompted a

significant mobilization of both government and non-government enities

to improve the situation of poor children and adolescents. Not only

does human compassion demand attention for destitute youths, but a

provision of the 1988 Constitution recognizes that children and

adolescents must be the primary target of social programs and public

assistance due to their special vulnerability. These constitutional

provisions have been further developed in the basic law known as the

“Statue for Children and Adolescents.” This Statue, enacted in 1990,

has been praised by UNICEF as one of the moset comprehensive in the

world.

Government programs, including the installation of hundreds of

Centers for Comprehensive Child Care, address basic needs such as

education, distrubution of nutritious meals, health care and the

promotion of children’s rights. The “Pact for the Children”, co-signed

by the President of Brazil and 24 state governors, set up a “Plan of

Action” which is intended to fully implement the constitutional and

legal provisions that provide for protection of children and

adolescents. Several fedrral agencies oversee the execution of

government programs for children and adolescents designed to give to

Brazilian yourth opportunities for a better life, education, shelter,

and love. Moreover, as mandated by law, 21 states and 1,654

municipalities have established special Councils for Children’s

Rights. Several hot-lines are operating throughout Brazil making it

easier for children to seek help and report instances of violence,

neglect or abuse.