

Brazil: In midst of political crisis, increased risks for human rights defenders

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In a new joint briefing paper sent to the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders, the International Service of Human Rights and Terra de Direitos highlight a disturbing lack of protection for at-risk activists in the country, which has left 26 defenders murdered this year



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In a new joint briefing paper sent to the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders, the *International Service of Human Rights* (ISHR) and Brazilian NGO *Terra de Direitos* highlight a disturbing lack of protection for at-risk activists in the country. Today they call on the Rapporteur to make an official visit to the country as soon as possible.

With 26 defenders murdered in this year, the organisations denounce the lack of implementation of the National Protection Programme for human rights defenders and highlight the accentuated risks facing those working on land and environmental issues in the context of business projects.

‘It is clearly incredibly dangerous to defend human rights in Brazil’, said ISHR’s Ben Leather. ‘Whoever is holding power in the country, it is imperative that they provide effective protection for defenders and end impunity for attacks against them if they are serious about guaranteeing the rights of Brazil’s citizens’.

The paper comes at a time of political flux, social unrest and institutional crises in the light of President Dilma Rousseff’s impeachment process.

‘The risks for human rights defenders already implied by an economic model which favours the imposition of large-scale projects and a legislative context which relegates civil liberties, are now exacerbated by a provisory Government which has demoted human rights on the public agenda’, said Terra de Direitos’ Layza Queiroz.

In his first weeks in office, interim President Michel Temer has been widely [criticised](#) by civil society for having folded the Ministry of Human Rights, Women and Race Equality, the Minister of Culture and the Minister of Rural Development. His new cabinet is made up solely of men.

In 2004 the Brazilian government created the National Protection Programme for Human Rights Defenders, but – as the briefing paper details – it only exists formally in six of the country’s 26 States, it lacks a legal framework and it still requires a clear work methodology.

‘We are more concerned now than ever’, said Ms Queiroz. ‘The programme was never prioritised by the last government, but has now been moved to the Ministry of Justice, whose head has questioned the legitimacy of social movements’.

‘We hope that the Special Rapporteur can urge Brazil’s current leadership to recognise the legitimacy of civil society, prioritise the protection of human rights defenders, and arrange for him to visit the country as soon as possible’, said Mr Leather.

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