Protests in Rio de Janeiro after 8-year-old shot dead

23/09/2019



Rio de Janeiro, September 23 (RHC)-- Hundreds of residents in one of Rio de Janeiro's poorest neighborhoods marched this weekend to demand an end to violence in the Brazilian city after an eight-year-old girl was killed by a stray bullet during a police operation.

Saturday's rally, which featured shouts of "Justice! Justice!", came after Agatha Sales Felix was shot dead in the Complexo do Alemao favela on Friday amid what police said was a shoot-out with suspected criminals. Officials confirmed her death and said an investigation into the incident had been opened.

According to the police's account of events, cited by the Associated Press news agency, officers were standing in a corner when they were attacked from various directions. They responded to the attack, but there were no reports of other people being injured or arrested during the incident, AP reported.

However, some Complexo do Alemao residents blamed Felix's death on police, who have killed more than 1,200 people in Rio de Janeiro state so far this year during their operations. "There was no shoot-out when Agatha was hit," Renata Trajana told AP. "We know the atrocities that are happening here."

Amnesty International, meanwhile, slammed the eight-year-old's killing, saying Rio's authorities had failed to "fulfill their constitutional duty to protect a unique and fragile life."

"How long will we insist on a public security policy that makes the state, which should protect all of us, violate our right to life?" the organisation asked on Saturday in a series of posts on Twitter. "We demand that the state assume its responsibility to protect the human right to life of all, regardless of their race and regardless of their place of residence," it added.

Police killings in Rio de Janeiro state - of which poor, black citizens are disproportionate victims - have soared under Governor Wilson Witzel's watch. Police in the state killed 1,249 people in the first seven months of this year - more than five a day - marking a more than 16 percent increase compared with the same period in 2018, according to Rio's Public Security Institute (ISP). The rise means police lethality in Rio has reached its highest level since 2003, when records began.

Meanwhile, according to the non-government violence monitor Crossfire, a growing number of people are hit, often killed, each year by stray bullets - some fired by criminals, some by police. There were 225 deaths by stray bullets last year and more than 100 so far this year, the monitor told AP last month.

Witzel, who assumed office at the beginning of January, has previously pledged to "slaughter" criminals by using helicopter-borne snipers and warned that Rio would "dig graves" for those breaking the law under his leadership as part of his promised crackdown on the drug gangs who rule many of the state's favelas.
Edited by Ed Newman