

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

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Washington D.C., May 16, 2012

Dilma Rousseff
President of the Federative Republic of Brazil
Brasília – DF

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Dear President Rousseff,

I am writing to express our support for the establishment of a truth commission to clarify the facts surrounding human rights violations committed from 1946 to 1988 in Brazil. We are very encouraged by the leadership that you have shown in making this possible, including your recent appointment of a group of distinguished and knowledgeable individuals to serve as commissioners. We believe that it is very important now that your administration do everything possible to ensure that the truth commission has the resources and support it needs to succeed in its historic mission.

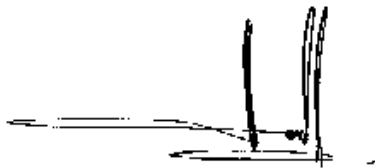
The creation of a truth commission offers an opportunity for Brazil to shed light on thousands of cases of grave human rights abuses, including nearly 500 cases of forced disappearances and deaths committed during the years of military rule (1964-1985). Not only the victims and their families, but Brazilian society as a whole, stand to benefit from a thorough and fair examination of serious human rights violations committed during that era.

Seeking the truth about past abuses is not a matter of political vengeance or witch hunting. Brazil has a binding obligation under international law to investigate, prosecute, and punish those individuals who share responsibility for serious violations of human rights. While truth commissions and other extrajudicial mechanisms can never substitute criminal investigations and prosecutions of atrocities, they have the potential to be valuable complementary tools for preserving historical memory, clarifying events, and attributing political and institutional responsibilities. We hope that Brazil's truth commission will be followed by serious efforts towards full accountability for past atrocities.

The success of the truth commission will depend, in large measure, on whether the commissioners receive the resources and support they need to conduct independent and thorough investigations. It is particularly important that they have ample access to any government documents that may be relevant to the cases under investigation, and that they receive the full and active cooperation of all state institutions, including the armed forces.

Again, we commend you for the important role that you have played in the creation of the truth commission. We are confident that, with the continued support of your administration, the commission will be able to make a major contribution to strengthening a culture of respect for human rights in Brazil.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Vivanco', with a horizontal line drawn underneath.

José Miguel Vivanco
Human Rights Watch

CC: Minister Maria do Rosário Nunes, Ministry of Human Rights

CC: Minister José Eduardo Cardozo, Ministry of Justice

CC: Minister Antonio de Aguiar Patriota, Ministry of Foreign Relations