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EU-BRAZIL Summit: neglect of poor causing extreme violence

(Brussels 4 July) As Portugal hosts its first Summit after taking over the EU Presidency Amnesty International urges it to set a precedent for the next six months by having a frank discussion about human rights with its counterpart, Brazil.

Just last week new clashes between police and drug traffickers in a Rio de Janeiro slum left 19 people dead. The high levels of violence that are plaguing Brazil's cities are partly a result of years of state neglect that have trapped poor neighbourhoods between the violence of criminal gangs and police brutality. The "Caveirão", or "Big Skull" - a military-style assault vehicle used to police Rio's favelas by storming into communities and known to fire at random - is still a powerful symbol of the failings of public security policies in Rio de Janeiro.

"A lack of long-term policy-making has put everyone at risk, including the police. Criminal gangs, be they drug factions, death squads or para-police, have rushed to fill the vacuum left by the state" said Dick Oosting, Director of Amnesty International's EU Office.

In a letter (available at www.amnesty-eu.org) Amnesty International welcomed recent steps such as the creation of Sistema Unico de Seguranca Pública (SUSP) but regretted the apparent lack of political will to implement the recommendations within the SUSP, especially where funding is concerned.

Amnesty International is also concerned by the federal government's attempts to equate organized crime with terrorism and efforts to introduce new anti-terror legislation.

"Ignoring the root causes of the problem: poverty, social exclusion, corruption and a weak judicial system will not provide long term solutions and will only worsen the situation" said Oosting.

"As Brazil's profile grows on the world stage, so too grows the duty of the Brazilian government to defend human rights internationally, regionally and most of all, at home", he added.

Amnesty International strongly welcomed Portugal's commitment to hold human rights discussions at every Summit during its presidency and hopes that tomorrow's encounter will be the first to deliver on this promise.