

URGENT ACTION

SEX WORKERS EVICTED AND ABUSED BY POLICE

Isabel (anonymized name), a sex worker in the city of Niterói, was assaulted and threatened after she publicly denounced the rape and extortion of sex workers by police during illegal raids and evictions on 23 May. Around 300 sex workers are now without a home and the safety of Isabel and her family remains at risk.

Isabel is a sex worker in Niterói, a city in the state of Rio de Janeiro. On 4 June she participated in a public hearing where she denounced several violent acts committed by police officers against her and her colleagues on 23 May, when the police invaded a building where around 300 sex workers live and engage with clients. In addition to extortion, Isabel and other sex workers claim that the police raped them, stole their property and planted evidence among their belongings to falsely incriminate them for crimes, prior to detaining them without warrants for interrogation and closing their apartments as “crime scenes”. Despite “structural flaws” being cited as one of the reasons for the building’s closure, only the floors and apartments where sex workers lived and worked were raided and shut down. The sale or purchase of sexual services is not a crime in Brazil and a representative of the Public Defender’s Office has argued that the police actions were illegal. Despite efforts to file complaints against the police, the sex workers have reported that the Special Police Unit for Violence Against Women (Delegacia Especializada de Atendimento à Mulher) refused to register their allegations on the day of the raid, and that the lawyers assisting them were forbidden from witnessing their interrogations.

After speaking out against the police violence and unlawful state actions, Isabel was kidnapped by four men and forced to enter a car on 21 June. Over a period of 30 minutes, the men cut Isabel’s arms with a razor blade, showed her pictures of her son entering his school and ordered her to stop making accusations against the police and talking to journalists. Since then, Isabel has not returned to her home, feels unable to report the kidnap and fears reprisals against her family. The building remains closed and around 300 sex workers are without a home.

The violence, extortion, arbitrary arrest and unlawful evictions committed by the Brazilian authorities violate the sex workers’ human rights to bodily integrity, security of person, health, housing and non-discrimination. The kidnapping and violence and intimidation against Isabel for speaking out against the government amount to violations of her human rights to liberty and security of person, bodily integrity, health and freedom of expression.

Please write immediately in Portuguese, English or your own language:

- Urging the authorities to protect Isabel and to investigate her kidnapping and threats against her family;
- Demanding that they ensure a prompt, thorough, independent and impartial investigation of the allegations of police violence against sex workers, and the unlawful evictions in Niterói during the 23 May operation;
- Calling on them to cancel the illegal closure of the apartments where sex workers lived and worked, enabling them to return to their homes.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 14 AUGUST 2014 TO:

State Secretary of Public Security
 José Mariano Beltrame
 Praça Cristiano Ottoni, s/nº
 Prédio da Central do Brasil
 CEP 20221-250, Rio de Janeiro, RJ
 Fax: +55 21 2334-9329
 Email:
 secretariodeseguranca@seguranca.rj.gov.br

Attorney General of the State of Rio de Janeiro
 Dra. Lucia Léa Guimarães Tavares
 Rua do Carmo, 27 – 13th floor
 CEP 20011-900 Centro
 Rio de Janeiro-RJ, Brazil
 Tel/Fax: +55 21 2332-9274 / 2332-9278
 Email: gpgsecretarias@pge.rj.gov.br
Salutation: Dear. Ms. Attorney General

And copies to:
President of the State Human Rights Commission (ALERJ)
 Dep. Marcelo Freixo
 ALERJ – Palácio Tiradentes
 Rua 1º de Março, s/n
 CEP 20010-090 Rio de Janeiro, RJ
 Fax: +55 21 2588-1268
 Email: marcelofreixo@alerj.rj.gov.br

Salutation: Dear Mr. Secretary

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The city of Niterói has been conducting a policy of urban renewal in the downtown area. The apartment building where around 300 sex workers lived and worked, and which the police raided on 23 May, is located in this region. The individuals rent their apartments so they can legally work (without the assistance of a third party, which is criminalized under the Brazilian Penal Code). They claim that the actions taken against them are part of a government campaign to “clean up” the centre of Niterói and related to efforts to increase the real estate value of the building.

The unlawful eviction of sex workers from their apartments has left them in dire financial circumstances, as many lost their savings, furniture and other property as a result of the eviction. Some have now been forced into homelessness, are living on the street and may have to sell sex in less safe environments.

On 4 June, Isabel was supported by the Human Rights Commission of the Rio de Janeiro State Legislature (ALERJ) to represent herself and the other sex workers at a public hearing to denounce the unlawful violence, harassment and evictions, and the ongoing police presence and harassment at the apartment building. A lawyer from the Public Defender’s Office following the case has also declared, after examining the sex workers’ reports, documents and other evidence, that the operation was illegal in all respects. There is also evidence that suggests that the building’s raid and closure was conducted in an illegal manner. For example, allegations of structural flaws should have been officially ordered by the sanitary authority, yet there is no evidence that a representative from that government body ever visited the building. Additionally, the building was closed by an order from the Civil Police (Polícia Civil), a government body that does not have the power to take such actions. The Brazilian Bar Association has challenged the apartment raid in the local court, but the judge in charge of the case responded that she could not interfere with an action taken by another government authority.

Since the 4 June hearing, threats to Isabel's life and her family's safety have intensified. On 21 June Isabel was kidnapped, threatened and injured in an apparent attempt to silence her opposition to the state's actions. Isabel and other people supporting the sex workers have also been followed by strangers in the streets, at times being photographed by them.

The legality of the police action is currently being contested by the Brazilian Bar Association and the Human Rights Commission of the State Assembly of Rio de Janeiro. Isabel and the sex workers are being represented by the Public Defender’s Office of the State of Rio de Janeiro and supported by several NGOs and federal and municipal congressmen.

Name: Isabel (anonymized name)

Gender m/f: f

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