

(English transcript from IVANIR DOS SANTOS - OXFAM - BOSTON
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My name is Ivanir dos Santos. I am an educator by profession. I am the Executive Secretary for an organization in Brazil with a staff composed of 95% afro-brazilians... to my knowledge, the only black organization dedicated to questions of human rights in Brazil.

In order to facilitate an understanding of our work and the problems we face, it is necessary to know something about our country.

Brazil is the largest country in South America. Many people think we speak Spanish. In an atypical context, we speak Portuguese.

First we need to remember that during 300 years, Brazil built a country relying on slave labor. We were one of the last countries to abolish slavery. After the abolition act in 1888, Brazil entered the first phase of industrialization. There was a basic characteristic to this process. Immigration of a white european work force was encouraged and the slave labor was marginalized. The justification was that the slaves would not know how to work with the new technologies. Thus was created a society in which the privileged are white and the less privileged are black and mestizo.

Another interesting factor is that in the '30's when there was a major increase in industrialization, 70% of our population lived in rural areas and only 30% in the urban areas; while today the inverse is our reality.

Brazil today is the fourth country in the world in food production; while 32 million people starve each day.

Of the 140 million population, 70 million earn the minimum wage equivalent to \$70 dollars a month.

One percent of the population controls 51,8% of all lands in Brazil. Five percent of the population controls 70% of the nationally produced wealth. It is this concentration of wealth that generates the social problems for the majority of Brazil's population.

It is impossible to analyse the phenomenon of street children in Brazil if one does not understand the distribution of wealth in our country.

It was in 1988 that I coordinated a study for an international organization about the deaths of street children. We investigated a protest raised by groups working directly with street children. In a year and a half in the city of Duque de Caxias, in the State of Rio de Janeiro, 22 children had been killed. These 22 children all participated in a diocesan

organized program for 200 children. At the same time, in another city of Rio, Volta Redonda, there was a report that 21 children had disappeared. During the investigation I requested an interview with the State Police Chief. I told him of the report made by the diocesan organization of the death of 22 children. He said it was a lie. Since he seemed to be the one who should know, I requested that he send me the official report from the Institute for Legal Medicine. He was indeed correct, 22 children had not been killed. In the period I was investigating, the report stated there had been 142 killings of children and adolescents. Out of curiosity I pursued a similar report from another city and discovered there had been 162 killings during the same period..

Contrary to common belief, killings of street children in Brazil is not a new phenomenon. This is our inheritance as a slave state. The publicity around the question grew after 1988 when we commemorated the first 100 years of abolition.

Who are these children who are killed? Just as added information, last year in the city where I live (the city of Rio de Janeiro) there were 450 killings of children and adolescents. From January to June of 1993, in six months, 350 more were known to have been killed. 78.2% of all those killed are blacks. 75% are between 15 and 17 years of age. These are adolescents without work, who do not attend school; and, yes, some few do commit crimes against our patrimony.

Who kills these children? Police, former police and popular militias, hired gunmen... contracted by local merchants.

Here are some more facts: in 1990 in one 'favela' of Rio 11 persons were kidnapped; of the 11, 9 were minors. All are disappeared until today. In 1991, near Christmas, in another 'favela', 6 children were killed and one girl escaped alive. All are killed at gunpoint. In 1992, when we thought there would be no more mass killings, again near Christmas, in yet another 'favela' 6 adolescents were killed. And this was inspite of notable public pressure from International Organizations, of which Amnistia International was a leader! The great shock was in August with the ambush in front of the Candelaria Church, where 9 were killed, 8 being minors.

That was one of the most terrible nights I have ever spent! I was called at 1AM and told of the ambush. For reasons of my own personal safety, I am not free to walk the streets in the early hours of the day. First we succeeded in organizing those who had been spared. The voice on the street spoke of over 200 as having been executed! It was a night of terror. We succeeded in protecting the survivors; pressuring the police to a serious investigation of the killings and, thirdly, reporting immediately to the international community all that had happened.

This particular crime allowed for major repercussion only because it occurred on the steps of Rio's most famous church where Brazil's elite marry. The church is also a short distance from Rio's famous financial district. Having survived this crisis, we felt nothing more could happen.

But just as I was preparing to travel to Europe for a conference and continue my trip here to the United States, we were advised by a group that in a wealthy area of Copacabana, 16 children had disappeared. To date the whereabouts of these children is unknown. Our fear now is that there will be a return to the tactic of disappearances so as not to leave dead bodies around.

If I may, another important fact about Brazil: the second largest black population in the world resides in Brazil; second only to Nigeria. Few people are aware of this. The popular image of Brazil is of real racial democracy. But we know this as a lie.

Brazil carries these characteristics: our economy is greatly influenced by the United States; our intellectuals identify more with European thought; and the majority of our people reflect Eastern Africa. These are but a few of the challenges we face in Brazil.

QUESTIONS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Explain more about your visit to the United States. With whom do you wish to partner? What about dialogue within Latin America?

First I need to say that this visit is primarily to permit others to know about our Brazilian peoples and what is happening to them. My sense is that little is known about us here in the US. I am very interested in networking with human rights groups and with african americans. Rather than concentrate on afrocentrism, I see a challenge to think in terms of the diaspora of black peoples.

Secondly, the question of on-going dialogue within LA.. I have direct contact with Bruce Harris in Guatemala. He is my personal friend. Similar phenomenon exist in Colombia, in South Africa for sure and in other countries: that which portrays the killing of street children as crime prevention for the future. There is a definite tendency for this problem to increase, not only in Latin America. The economic crisis is hitting even wealthy countries. Now that communism is no longer the enemy; there seems to be a need to seek out internal enemies. In Europe its the immigrant population; in the US the blacks and hispanics are targeted and in Brazil, blacks and mestizos living in 'favelas'. This is dangerous doctrine. At one time, Harris and I proposed an international conference on Death Squads and the Disappearance and Killing of Street Children while at a meeting in Germany.

What happened to the idea?

Germany, which had seemed sensitized to the question, never pursued the idea. Bruce and I were to have been on the steering committee.

Returning to the local community scene. What is happening on the local community level?

Two questions must be considered here. Even though community movements work hard at networking and organizing, their power is limited. That's because of two considerations: The first is that public power, which is essentially responsible for the well being of its peoples and their rights as citizens, is absent from these populations and their needs. Their common response is to cross their arms facing these atrocities. Secondly, the middle class in Brazil becomes an accomplice through its silence, apparently believing that criminals are being eliminated.

A good example of this is that after the ambush at Candelaria, a local radio station placed a telephone at the service of the public in an effort to obtain leads in the case. Thousands of calls repeated the same refrain: Those killed represent a limited response to the 'problem'; many more should have been killed!

Our dedication, as well as that of groups also working with marginalized populations, not only with the street children, but also with the organization of the afro-brazilian population, causes us to also face death threats. We are perceived as protecting criminals.

The second aspect which is interesting to observe is that the absence of public power in these areas, opens the way for increased drug traffic. It is so hard to think that the only opening for earning money, which is, of course, a positive value, is for our youth to enter the drug market.

One of the most recent contributions that our organization CEAP (Support Center for Marginalized Populations) has made as an alternative to the above is that we just finished producing a RAP record, cut by adolescents from the 'favelas'. We believe strongly that it is necessary to foster positive values among this population which become reference points in their lives. We receive absolutely no support from government structures. The little support we have comes from the international community. And this is a relatively small contribution for developing any serious action within Brazil. Far greater than the humanitarian side of the question of marginalization in Brazil is the political context. We must know that we are dealing with the lives of millions of persons who are excluded from the practice of citizenry in their own country.

What inroads have been made in the trials of these atrocities?
Are there legal resources?

Brazil has many dedicated lawyers, but again, their impact is small. We have a public prosecutor who works with us, who has succeeded in having some of the perpetrators jailed. However, as a result of her stand, she is obliged to move about daily with the protection of three police officers!

In the article which appeared this morning in the Boston Globe, you were quoted as having commented to Reverend Rivers that there is great need to transform violence into constructive energy in society. What attempts have you made in this direction?

I will use a personal example first. I am a person born in a 'favela'. My mother was a prostitute. During my first four years of childhood, I was 'trained' with the other children to pressure for our mothers' release from jail, by crying publicly at the jail. When I was four years old, I was the victim of a police roundup in which I was kidnapped and sent to a public institution - a FUNABEM (Foundation for the Well Being of Minors). At fourteen, I returned to the house of prostitution in an attempt to reconnect with my mother. The women recognized me immediately, while I remembered none of them. Upon inquiry, I was informed that soon after my disappearance, my mother committed suicide by setting herself afire. I returned to the institution and completed my high school. On my own, I made a visit to a stepfather in jail to try to learn something of my family. During that visit I recognized several of the inmates as former companions of mine at the FUNABEM. They were in jail and I wasn't. That experience inspired me to organize the former students of FUNABEM. I finished my college degree in Education. Normally someone with my background would be a gang leader for drug traffic. I do not tell you my story so that you conclude that I think that by will power people can change their lives. That is in fact not my intention. The example I wish to convey is that organization is indeed a way in which to better our destiny.

My personal experience, as well as our recent record release, are examples of how I envision channelizing energies in society. The cultural contribution of marginalized populations, and of blacks in particular often lies dormant; not seen as a positive factor. It is more common for society to attempt to mold us into behaviors which betray our identity. Our desire is to give value to that which expresses who we truly are as blacks. The new record has some interesting background: all the music criticizes the police. This will impact Brazilian society. The lead song tells the story of the disappeared from Acari. Our intent is to use a popular cultural instrument, music in our case, to speak of the human rights struggle. These are examples of ways we are creating to harness energies for transformation. Our struggle is in vain, however, if we do not also work for change in the

political and economical structures of Brazil.

I know something of the organizations of afro-brazilians in Salvador, in Bahia. Where are you in your organization in relation to Lodum, for example?

In the first place, I am a counsellor for Lodum. This is a serious question that you raise. In 1991, we succeeded in organizing the First National Meeting of Black Movements in Brazil. This meeting was attended by 600 delegates from 250 groups of blacks. There are approximately 5000 organized groups who identify with the black struggle, the racial question in Brazil. The difficulty is to unify these groups.

International Organizations which identify with the question of marginalized peoples are reluctant to support the racial struggle in Brazil. It is difficult for them to imagine the implications of this struggle. They see the black question only in terms of the poverty cycle. In the meantime, social analysts in Brazil, who also know well the racial problem in global terms, reflect that as the South African situation moves along, the next area of focus will be Brazil. The present question of street children killings has only anticipated for the world the results of racism in Brazil.

There is a national coordination of black organizations in Brazil. I am a member of the direction of this coordination. It is difficult for us to have national meetings... distances are so great; Brazil is a country of continental proportions. Movements centered around the racial question do not receive the same support as the labor union struggle, for example. This is because the majority of peoples we defend belong to the informal labor market or are counted among the unemployed. That's why we feel it so necessary to tell our story, make our voice heard. We are seeking allies.

In 1995, Brazil will commemorate the 300th anniversary of the death of the most famous antislavery leader in our history, Zumbi, dos Palmares! Many years before socialism was thought of in the Soviet Union, Zumbi had built a republic in Brazil's Northeast. Our hope is to be able to publish some works about black culture, our struggle and our organizations. We believe that once these publications are translated and available in the English-speaking world, our racial struggle in Brazil will become better known.

Just another piece of information for you. Our national congress has 470 members. Only 5 are black. Of the five, only two identify themselves as black. In Rio de Janeiro, where I live, there are 70 State Representatives; only one is black. This one knows he's black because we help him to remember! This is a very serious question; that of choosing to understand that there is a racial struggle in our country.

Another piece of information. Our organization receives support from one European sector. Thus far we have no connections here in the United States; an interesting cultural note to be sure. Sometimes partnerships are among equals. A majority of financial aid goes to middle class groups with similar structures... or the same religious tradition. That which is different is sometimes threatening. We hope our work contributes to respecting differences; not to fostering inequalities. Our racial struggle in Brazil targets racial attitudes and behaviors.

Another project of ours is our radio program. We rent space on one of the local stations and we have an audience of some 800 thousand listeners. It is a program which offers reggae, Lodum's music and African music, as well as important information for the community. This is another new area for us. For this, we have financial aid from groups in Sweden. We have no space on Brazilian television. Brazilian television denies our image and thus, does not contribute to our positive self-image. It is obvious that aggressivity in the population is directly connected to the ways in which society images values.

Talk about forms of resistance against Death Squads.

For now, the population in general still fears the police. Death Squads are made up of police force. We try to publicize a public posture which may help eliminate some of the fear.

In 1991, my car was attacked by police who opened machine gun fire. I publicized the case and succeeded in demanding that the police were jailed. International public opinion, especially organized by Amnesty International, pressured our government. The effect of this action in the 'favelas' was significant. For the first time the police were after a black who was well known. These are the teachable moments. Rather than the attitude of some blacks who prefer to settle their differences outside the public arena! This second posture does not educate. But don't imagine that we resemble a place like England, where if a black is mistreated by police, the public react. If we are not careful, however, we could see actions like that in Los Angeles. The problem is that our youth are losing hope. Those who know of the phenomenon of the 'arrastao' (dragnetting) on Rio's beaches, know that when youth lose hope, they no longer fear the police. This is extremely dangerous.

Do letters of protest to the Brazilian government help in any way? Also, if one wishes to contribute financially to your work, how can that be done?

Yes, letter writing does have an impact. Amnesty International coordinates these efforts. But if you were to write in protest every time there is an injustice, you will never leave your desk! We have a regular FAX connection with Amnesty International in London. That way you are sure your efforts will be effective.

As far as contributions... We are a recognized organization which works directly with blacks, women, children and adolescents, as well as in documentation. We have several publications. I promise to send you copies of them. We sponsor a communications center on global issues. We also have specific projects, such as the one I mentioned on Zumbi - 300 years; or, "NAO MATAM NOSSAS CRIANCAS" (Stop Killing Our Children). This second project is directed toward the population-at-large to protest the genocide of children. Many small organizations contribute to our projects. For us the genocide question requires that we view the child in a family-community context.

Projects which view the child in an isolated manner: providing food and schooling are a response to an immediate need. Family and society need to respond to their own needs. Fundamental to the struggle is the organization of the black population. When human rights are respected, our children will benefit. It is important that the population demand quality public schools. Otherwise, we find ourselves drying ice or putting out fires.

The whole tourism question seems central for the Brazilian image, as well as for economic reasons. Would it be of any help if we initiated a campaign to boycott tourism in Brazil?

A first consideration is the following: a part of the killings is directly related to the tourist industry... with hotel owners as backers. Child street thieves disrupt the tourist trade. A second one is related to child prostitution. We have pressured for a Congressional Investigation of this question. The investigation states that 500 thousand children, between 9 and 14 years of age are prostituting themselves in tourist related activity. There are tourist agencies, known in Europe, for offering in their packages, photos of girls available for tourists in Brazil.

I do not believe that this is the moment for any type of boycott of tourism. This is the time to gather information and discover the best ways to educate the population about the reality in which we live. A boycott is an effective political tool, but it is important to choose well the timing. A boycott is ineffective if there is not a strong local movement to also pressure from within. Both aspects require serious coordination.

What we can do is to promote alternative kinds of tourism; that is, a tourism which encourages students and intellectuals involved in human rights issues, to visit our country and enter into direct contact with marginalized populations involved in the struggle.

I think the South African experience can teach us a lot. The population needs to be aware of the situation and involved in the decisions affecting its future. Then pressure will be correct.

There is another kind of tourism I'm interested in also. There

are tourist agencies, supported by black militants in Brazil... blacks encouraging blacks to visit Brazil. What I find sad is that the trip involves the typical beach visits to Copacabana and surrounding night clubs. There is no opportunity to touch into the Brazilian reality I perceive as important. I would like to be able to influence this type of tourism.

When will there be elections in Brazil? Is this a hopeful scene?

For us, next years' elections are a sign of hope. I am personally involved in this political process. One, I hope we can elect Lula, President of Brazil, and secondly, elect Benedita da Silva, black activist for Rio's favelas, the first black senator in Brazil. But I know this is not going to be an easy battle!

Will you be using your Campaign against genocide in Lula's campaign?

On the contrary, our work is independent of a political party. However, any person with political sensitivity knows that political parties are needed in order to change a country. Poverty is concrete; we do not need to legitimate poverty in order to be envolved politically.