

OFFICIAL ACTION OF THE
LATIN AMERICA DEPARTMENT
Division of Overseas Ministries
National Council of Churches of Christ in U.S.A.

STATEMENT ON POLITICAL REPRESSION AND TERROR IN BRAZIL
(June 5, 1970)

I. INTRODUCTION

The people of the United States are deeply involved in the economic, military, cultural, religious and political affairs of Brazil. That nation is the third largest recipient of U.S. economic assistance in the world. Over 600 U.S. industries operate in Brazil as well as hundreds of other U.S. based institutions and agencies. Approximately 2,100 U.S. Protestant personnel representing 120 denominations and mission sending agencies and 700 U.S. Roman Catholic personnel representing 38 religious orders and lay agencies live and work in Brazil.

In spite of the vast range of this involvement the people of the United States have not been apprised of the extensive information regarding the repression, terror and torture by which Brazil is governed today. The result is that both public and private funds appear to support and strengthen a military regime which, in the name of law and order and of anti-communism, crushes dissent and all advance toward a free and open society. Christian concern must center, in such a situation, upon the loss of human rights and the deprivation of that dignity which belongs to all men as creatures of God.

It is not the business of the North American churches to concern themselves with the affairs of every country around the world, but the cries of oppressed people must not be ignored and especially not when these cries come from people whose lives are affected by the policies of public and private institutions in our own country.

II. CONDITIONS IN BRAZIL

In 1964 Brazil suffered a "coup d'etat" at the hands of the Brazilian military. The U.S. Government immediately extended diplomatic recognition to the new regime and U.S. economic aid was sharply increased. Many United States Government officials have considered the military officers who took control of Brazil in 1964 to be progressive and dedicated to the economic development of their country and to the preservation of democratic institutions. Under this tutelage Brazil increased its Gross National Product by 3% in 1964 to over 4% in 1968. But this growth has been achieved at an extraordinarily high price in social and political control.

Brazil has become a virtual police state, and accounts of the most brutal and humiliating tortures have been filtering out of the country since the fall of 1969. Allegations of political torture are not entirely new. Many Brazilians say that such tortures began with the military take-over in 1964, although it was not until the fall of 1969 that these stories began to attract attention outside Brazil.

Virtually no sector of the Brazilian population has been immune from the repressive policies of the military government, though the blows have fallen hardest on students, professors, journalists, priests, nuns, ministers, politicians, lawyers, workers and artists. Anyone in Brazil today who publicly dissents from

government policy is in danger of running afoul of the country's stringent laws of national security, and of arbitrary arrest and persecution. Furthermore, anyone suspected of anti-government actions, or of having information which might lead to the arrest of others is in danger of arrest for interrogations -- including torture as a means of extracting information or confessions.

We recognize that the Brazilian government officially denies that political prisoners are tortured. But the reports have been too numerous, too widely documented and recognized by too many reliable sources to be discounted. All indications are that a quiet and efficient "reign of terror" against political dissent is currently continuing in Brazil. If torture is practiced in this hemisphere it is incumbent upon us as churchmen and citizens both to take note of this fact and actively seek to determine to what extent our own government or business community are in any way supporting repression and torture in that country.

III. LATIN AMERICA DEPARTMENT POSITION

The Latin America Department, Division of Overseas Ministries of the National Council of Churches of Christ, U.S.A. declares its solidarity with the Committee of International Affairs of the U.S. Catholic Conference in its Brazil Statement of May 26, 1970, and further registers its own position as follows:

1. As churchmen and citizens we condemn the torture of men and women anywhere, at any time and under any circumstances.
2. We call upon the Congress of the United States to schedule a Congressional Hearing on the effects of U.S. Government policy in Brazil, examining especially the nature and dimension of U.S. aid to determine to what extent public funds are used to support political repression in Brazil.
3. We call upon the World Council of Churches to invite the Vatican to share in an investigation of possible abuses of civil liberty in Brazil, with special attention to alleged arrests and torture and reported acts of intimidation against persons and institutions, and to publicize the results of the investigation.
4. We urge the Commission on Human Rights of the United Nations and the Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States to initiate an investigation based on the numerous depositions and other evidence of torture in Brazil perpetrated upon students, professors, journalists, priests, nuns, ministers, politicians, lawyers, workers, artists and others.
5. We take note of the fact that reports of political repression are coming from a country which is currently experiencing a period of rapid industrial growth stimulated by the direct investments of major North American and Western European corporations. As U.S. Churches begin a special year of study on Latin America and as concern for church-support for economic and social development in Latin America grows, we ask those churches, their judicatories, boards and agencies to seek to determine to what extent U.S. economic investment (as it is taking place in Brazil) in any way contributes to or depends upon social and political repression.