

Justice for Marielle Franco

March 2018

The Executive Council of the Latin American Studies Association laments and repudiates the murder of Afro-Brazilian human rights activist Marielle Franco in Rio de Janeiro on March 14, 2018. Franco was a much-admired elected Rio city council member, a feminist, socialist, lesbian, and defender of human rights in Rio's favelas. Franco was murdered in what appears to be a politically motivated extrajudicial execution after she criticized the current state of violent militarized intervention in the city's favelas and the resulting high death rates, especially among young black men.

According to the Instituto de Segurança Pública, military police killed 1000 people in Rio in 2017 alone, while 43 police were killed in return. Aiming to pacify the favelas of Rio, the federal state, under the presidency of Michel Temer, issued decree No 9288 on February 16, 2018, placing the military in charge of security in these neighborhoods. In addition, the police were placed under the command of the military, which means that any accusations of human rights violations would be adjudicated in military courts.

This militarization of security in Rio's favelas makes a violent situation even more violent, and clearly feeds into more violations of human rights of the citizens of the targeted neighbourhoods. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed their grave concerns about these policies on March 13, a day before Franco was murdered.

Franco and her driver, Anderson Pedro Gomes, were killed when returning from an event on the evening of March 14. By all witness accounts, this was a premeditated assassination; she was killed with four bullets in the head. Franco, a vocal defender of human rights throughout her life, had complained multiple times about the excessive violence used by the police, and the institutional racism that permeated the justice system. As rapporteur of the special committee of the Rio City Council charged with monitoring the activities of the police under the direction of the military, she was likely to become a fierce opponent of the federal militarization. A few days before her assassination she is reported to have filed a formal complaint against violent military intervention in the Acari favela, where she was from. Franco had also expressed her anger on Twitter over another killing of a young black man by the police the day before she was murdered herself.

Franco's murder also represents an open attack on Brazil's representative democracy. Marielle Franco received 46,000 votes in the municipal elections of October 2016, more than many of the legislators currently serving in the Brazilian Congress. The assassination of Marielle Franco disenfranchises her constituents and those who supported her, including favela residents, Afro-Brazilians, and progressives around the city.

The Latin American Studies Association (LASA) calls upon the Brazilian government to guarantee a swift, fair, and thorough investigation into the killing of Marielle Franco taking into account her political position as Afro-descendant city councillor, feminist and human rights defender, and urges the Brazilian judiciary to make sure both the material perpetrators of this crime as well as those who masterminded it will be held accountable. In addition, LASA calls upon the federal government and Rio City Council to take seriously the concerns expressed by Marielle Franco before she died in regard to the militarized response to crime in the favelas and to reconsider its strategy to provide security for the entire population of Rio.

LASA is the largest professional Association in the world for individuals and institutions engaged in the study of Latin America. With over 12,000 members, LASA brings together experts on Latin America from across the globe and from all disciplines and diverse occupational endeavours. Brazilian studies and Brazilian academics are a central part of our organization.

About LASA

The Latin American Studies Association (LASA) is the largest professional association in the world for individuals and institutions engaged in the study of Latin America. With over 12,000 members, over 65% of whom reside outside the United States, LASA is the one association that brings together experts on Latin America from all disciplines and diverse occupational endeavors, across the globe. LASA's mission is to foster intellectual discussion, research, and teaching on Latin America, the Caribbean, and its people throughout the Americas, promote the interests of its diverse membership, and encourage civic engagement through network building and public debate.

If you wish to interview a LASA Executive Council member, you can contact the LASA communications office at (412) 648-7929 or lasa@lasaweb.org.

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