

# 'Zero Tolerance' comes to Brazil

**Rio authorities are rolling out a crime-fighting plan that mirrors policies Rudy Giuliani used in New York and Mexico City.**

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**RIO DE JANEIRO** – His stepmother beat him, so Aluizio Pereira fled for the streets.

Three years later, the scrawny 13-year-old still sleeps on the sidewalk along Ipanema Beach, begging for handouts in the shadows of the luxury hotels that dominate the upscale neighborhood.

But to some, Aluizio is more than just a reminder of a grim social reality. In this divided city, he represents a threat to public security and - thanks to former New York City mayor Rudy Giuliani - the police are working to clear him, and others like him, off the streets.

Fed up with a growing climate of urban disorder, Rio police have declared a new war against the city's minor offenders - and they credit Mr. Giuliani for the idea.

Following Giuliani's assumption that public disorder leads to serious crime, Rio's new Zero Tolerance program targets the city's petty criminals. It increases the number of beachside surveillance cameras and radio-patrol police; cracks down on unlicensed vendors, petty thieves, and unruly motorists; and intensifies arrests of the self-appointed attendants who coerce motorists to pay for free parking.

With the program's expansion in April, the focus has turned to reducing Rio's street population by discouraging beggars' encampments and placing street children in shelters. While proponents of Zero Tolerance believe the measures will help improve the quality of life and reduce overall crime, others fear the program unfairly targets the city's poor and vulnerable.

After reading a news story years ago about Giuliani's crime plan, which the ex-mayor credits for the vast drop in New York crime in the 1990s, Copacabana Military Police Chief Col. Celso Nogueira concluded that the strategy was well-suited to the densely populated, heavily touristed neighborhood. This isn't the first time Giuliani's methods have come to Latin America. In 2003, the ex-mayor was paid a \$4.3 million consulting

fee to create a citywide crime program in Mexico City, recommending stiffer penalties and similar crackdowns on minor offenses.

Nearly five months after the pilot program's launch in Copacabana, proponents believe that Zero Tolerance is reforming basic attitudes in a city where "total tolerance" has contributed to increasing crime and disorder. Brazilians may be indignant about the violence in the shantytowns, but they'll still park their cars on the sidewalks, Colonel Nogueira points out. "It's never them, it's always everyone else," he says. "People don't think about their own crimes they're committing."

However, with Zero Tolerance's expansion into the wealthy Ipanema and Leblon neighborhoods in April, police are targeting a very specific type of citizen - Rio's beggars and street children. While their presence alone may not be criminal, the street population is generating a climate of fear and insecurity for residents and tourists alike, according to the program's supporters.

"People are being intimidated into giving handouts," says Evelyn Rosenzweig, chair of the Leblon Community Board. "They're afraid that they're going to be robbed if they don't. There are groups of street kids everywhere, sniffing glue, mothers exploiting their children - you can't feel at home here."

While unable to forcibly evict them, Rio police are stepping up measures to "make the street populations uncomfortable," in Rosenzweig's words, removing bedding materials from the streets and increasing sweeps on street vendors and other "marginals" contributing to the appearance of disorder.

In addition to ramping up preventative measures against thefts and muggings - frequently attributed to the poor, roving youth - police have begun an intensive program of collecting street children and sending them to shelters.

Such measures have prompted vehement reactions from advocacy groups and public officials who say the program victimizes Rio's most defenseless. "These initiatives never provide a solution - they aim to 'clean up' the streets for tourists and South Zone residents," says Monica Alkmim, program coordinator of São Martinho, an organization that advocates on behalf of street children. "The operations have become more violent every time," she adds.

Aluizio recounts the violent ways in which police regularly treat him and his peers. "Any time we go near a tourist, we're a threat," he says. "The police beat us with pieces of wood and use pepper spray, just because we're sleeping on the sidewalk."

Nogueira insists that Zero Tolerance encourages police to use "conversation, with force only as a last resort," expressing optimism about the plan's long-term success. But he and other police acknowledge the need for further institutional support for Zero Tolerance to live up to its promise.

Although Rio's Zero Tolerance is far smaller in scale - and more individually tailored to the afflictions of specific neighborhoods - the Brazilian program also lacks the full-fledged government backing that is central to Mexico's "Plan Giuliani."

Nogueira admits that the collaborative partnerships he had envisioned for the pilot program have failed to come to fruition, though he remains pleased with the community-based councils supporting the program.

The street population, in particular, is "a social problem that shouldn't be a question of public security," admits Leblon Military Police Commander Carlos Eduardo Millan. "But it's come to the point where it's become a criminal problem. The police are the last resort, and they're going to blame us if we don't act."