

# Brazil leader starts rehab of Rio slum

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RIO DE JANEIRO, Brazil --

President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva visited a teeming hillside shantytown Friday to launch a multimillion-dollar program to build an outdoor elevator, sewage systems, improve roads and upgrade housing for slum residents.

Silva is the first Brazilian president to visit the Cantagalo shantytown or "favela," perched above the upscale beach districts of Copacabana and Ipanema.

The president arrived at the hillside community under heavy police guard. Access to the area was shut down as police occupied strategic points in the often violent shantytown, controlled by heavily armed drug gangs.

"We can't say that we will build mansions. We don't have money for that," Silva told a cheering crowd, packed with children waving Brazilian flags. "But we want to transform where you live into a decent and dignified place that you can be proud to live in."

More than \$20 million in investment from the federal and Rio de Janeiro state governments was pledged for Cantagalo and the neighboring Pavao-Pavaozinho shantytowns, home to about 50,000 people.

The Ministry of Cities said total investments in metropolitan Rio de Janeiro, which has more than 600 favelas, will total \$1.5 billion.

One of the planned public works is an elevator linking Cantagalo Hill to Ipanema below, improving access to bus and subway points, as well as 206 houses, child-care centers and sports arenas. The state government estimated that 4,219 families will be aided.

"Many people will say: 'Elevator? Why do poor people need an elevator? Elevators are for the rich.' No, elevators are for the poor to climb this hill," Silva said.

Work is to start in January and last two years, the government news agency Agencia Brasil said.

Silva said Rio de Janeiro state Gov. Sergio Cabral would grant land titles to residents of Cantagalo and Pavao-Pavaozinho, land that was occupied but ever legally acquired.

Residents applauded the project but expressed a note of skepticism. Other favela cleanup projects were begun with great fanfare but never concluded.

"We'll wait and see," said Luiz Bezerra do Nascimento, president of the Cantagalo Hill Residents' Association. "But you have to believe, you can't get negative."

Silva left Cantagalo and went downtown to visit famed architect Oscar Niemeyer, who turns 100 in December.

The president's visit came just a week after police traded fire with drug-gang members while attempting to arrest a man sought in a robbery that resulted in the death of an Italian tourist. No one was hurt in the gun battle but two streets in Ipanema were briefly shut down causing panic among residents.

Rio's shantytowns sprung up at the end of the 19th century as freed slaves made their homes on unclaimed land, mostly along the city's steep hillsides. Later migrants from the country's poor northeast swelled the favelas.

Today, about a fifth of Rio de Janeiro's 6 million residents live in the favelas. Many have been there for generations.

In recent years, the government has taken steps to incorporate the ramshackle favelas into the urban infrastructure, giving names to streets and putting them on city maps.