

Bolsonaro loosens gun laws as violence spirals out of control in Brazil



Brasilia, January 16 (RHC)-- Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro has signed a decree temporarily making it easier for Brazilians to buy guns, the first step toward a campaign promise to overturn regulations that have essentially prohibited civilians from bearing arms.

Bolsonaro won the presidency by running on a neo-liberal, far-right, law-and-order platform. His message resonated with voters in Brazil, which in 2017 had a record 64,000 murders, more than any other country in the world, with 43,000 of those homicides the result of firearms.

A one-time army captain who took office on January 1st, Bolsonaro wants to overturn a 2003 law that was tantamount to a ban on civilians from purchasing guns, arguing that Brazilians have the right to bear arms and defend themselves from criminals, a narrative that right-wing supporters of gun ownership use in the United States.

Critics of gun ownership argue that such claims do not work as mass shootings continue to be on the rise in the U.S. as they claim the lives of thousands every year.

The number of mass shootings in 2018 is on track to match, or even surpass, the number of mass shootings last year. The year 2017 ended with 346 mass shootings, according to the Gun Violence Archive. As of mid-December, 2018 has seen 334 mass shootings.

The decree, which will expire unless it is ratified within 120 days by Congress, will remove the "discretionary" role that federal police have played in approving civilians' requests to buy guns. Bolsonaro has said that decisions on who may or may not carry weapons are completely subjective.

In 2017, the last year government data was available, about 330,000 civilians in Brazil were legally registered to have a gun.

Accurate data on how many illegal firearms are in Brazil is difficult to come by, but previous studies from the Justice Ministry have indicated that nearly eight million weapons are in the country illegally.

Brazil's heavily armed drug gangs and paramilitary militias easily obtain weapons that are made by domestic manufacturers, mainly Taurus Armas SA, or smuggled over the country's porous borders with its neighbors.

Gangs in Rio de Janeiro almost exclusively carry Glock weapons now, and have illegally obtained an array of AR rifles that come from American and European manufacturers.

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