

Brazil Ex-Mayor to Be Tried By Jury for Death of Journalist

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One of Brazil's highest federal courts, the Superior Tribunal of Justice (STJ), ruled on December 4 that Maria Arivan de Holanda Lucena, the former mayor of Limoeiro do Norte, in the northeastern state of Ceará, should be tried before an ordinary court for the 2003 murder of Nicanor Linhares Batista, the owner of Radio Vale do Jaguaribe, a radio station based in the town.

Batista was killed with 11 shots inside the studio of his radio station. There was strong rivalry between Lucena and Batista. The journalist was very critical of the mayor since 2000, when Batista backed the candidacy of state legislator Paulo Duarte from the PSDB party. The radio man started getting death threats before he was murdered.

Arivan and her husband, federal judge José Maria de Oliveira Lucena, are jointly accused of hiring the two hit-men who gunned down Linhares inside the radio station on June 30, 2003, while taping his daily political program.

When Lucena was formally charged on March 20, 2008, by the Superior Tribunal of Justice, which has the power to try judges, Arivan asked to be tried with him before the same court. The court's refusal means she will be tried by a jury.

The Paris-based, international freedom of press organization Reporters Without Borders released a comment about the information: "Five years after we wrote to President Lula on July 25, 2003, to request a thorough investigation, we hope the real masterminds of this murder will finally be tried. Their conviction will be a clear signal of a readiness to combat the impunity which public officials too often think they enjoy."

An outspoken critic of Arivan, Linhares had received death threats. His murder caused an outcry and the case was taken before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. A total of nine people have been charged in connection with the murder.

Batista's radio program was one of the most popular radio shows in the region. He was considered a controversial journalist and his hard-hitting commentaries made many local politicians angry. He was 42.