

Press Organization Lauds Brazil in Case of Fight Against Impunity

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Paris-based international freedom of press organization Reporters Without Borders is hailing the progress being made in the investigation into the abduction and torture of two journalists employed by the Brazilian daily newspaper O Dia and their driver in the Rio de Janeiro favela of Batan on May 14.

Three military police officers wanted in connection with the case - Fábio Gonçalves Soares (also known as Fabinho Catiri), Marcos Antonio Alves da Silva (aka Marcos do BOPE) and André Luiz de Mattos (aka Cocada) - were arrested in a major operation in Rio involving more than 80 policemen. A fourth man identified as Nilson Bueno (aka Nilson Faustão) was also arrested.

Items seized during the operation included equipment belonging to an elite Rio de Janeiro state military police unit called the BOPE. The four detainees are to be charged with "forming a militia." Four other members of the military police are still being sought.

The O Dia employees were tortured for seven hours after being kidnapped by a militia based in Batan, where the journalists had been preparing a report for the previous two weeks. The case caused an outcry in Brazil, especially as police officers were allegedly involved in the militia.

The two alleged bosses of the militia - civilian police inspector Odinei Fernando da Silva (aka Dinei and Zero Um) and Davi Liberato de Araújo (aka Zero Dois) - were arrested in June.

"We salute the great progress being made towards solving this case and we hope a trial will soon be held that sheds light on the circumstance of this abduction and identifies all those responsible," Reporters Without Borders said.

"This investigation must be an example in combating impunity. It nonetheless confirms the existence of serious abuses within police units that will need far-reaching measures."

The Case

The reporter, photographer and driver of O Dia had already lived for 14 days inside the Batan Favela gathering material for a special report on the community when on the night of April 14 there was an ambush by 10 armed men with Ninja bonnets covering their faces.

After trying to convince in vain the residents in the area to lynch the O Dia's employees the criminals went to the house the team had rented in the slum and where the reporter had stayed. Getting to the house they subdued the reporter, drawing guns as if they were policemen. "You are arrested for ideological falsehood," said one of the hooded men, later identified as Zero Um.

All three were then taken to another house in the favela and waited for a "colonel" who was supposed to order their execution. In the meantime the journalist, photographer and driver were physically tortured and threatened. After the colonel arrived the torture session continued with electric shocks and choking by plastic bags.

There was also psychological torture with the militiamen showing they knew many details of the hostages' personal life. After hours of terror the bandits reached a verdict: the newspaper workers would be released.

Before they were let go however, they had their cell phones and money stolen. It was already 4:30 am when they were left at Avenida Brasil, in downtown Rio.