

Brazil Urged to Repeal Dictatorship-Era Anti-Press Law

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Reporters Without Borders called today on Brazil to repeal its press offenses law, which enabled the arrest on 26 October of editor and commentator José de Arimatéia Azevedo, of the Internet website Portal AZ (www.portalaz.com.br), which was shut down by a judge in Teresina (capital of the northern state of Piauí).

"He was arrested even though his lawyers said he had no intention of fleeing or avoiding a future court summons," the worldwide press freedom organization said.

"The Brazilian parliament should repeal the 1967 press law, passed during the 1964-85 military dictatorship and giving judges the right to imprison journalists for their public comments or writings."

Police arrested the editor in a raid on the Teresina offices of Portal AZ using a warrant issued a few hours earlier by Judge José Bonifácio Júnior at the request of lawyer Audrey Magalhães, who had been criticized in an editorial on the site.

Arimatéia Azevedo, who has long specialized in investigating organized crime, criticized online (under the pseudonym of Xico Pitomba) Antonio Rivanildo Feitosa da Silva, of regional TV station Meio Norte (his former employers), who was suing him for defamation and insults.

Arimatéia Azevedo responded on 6 October by criticizing Magalhães, Meio Norte's lawyer, and Feitosa da Silva. Magalhães then applied for his arrest for "insults" and for trying to "influence an ongoing legal action." The warrant issued said Azevedo's comments were obscene and "macho."

The Portal AZ editor, who has heart problems, is being held at the Piauí public security offices in Teresina. He told the online daily O Dia that a conciliation meeting between him and Feitosa da Silva had been set for 8 November. Justice officials are expected to rule on a request by his lawyers for a writ of habeas corpus early next week.

Piauí state secretary for public security Roberto Rios Magalhães called the shutdown of Portal AZ "illegal." The FENAJ (Federação Nacional de Jornalistas - National Journalists Federation) also criticized Azevedo's arrest as "an attack on press freedom, democracy and the national constitution."

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