

## Brazilian Inmates Take 200 Hostages and Demand Return of Their Leader

Contributed by N.U.  
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Inmates at a prison in Brazil's remote Amazon jungle were holding more than 200 people hostage, demanding the return of their leader from another prison. And while authorities agreed to bring him back, both sides remained at an impasse today, waiting for the other to make the first move.

Armed with makeshift knives, the inmates began their uprising during Sunday's visiting hours at the Urso Branco State Prison in Rondônia's state capital, Porto Velho, some 2,500 kilometers (1,500 miles) northwest of São Paulo.

The same prison was the site of a bloody five-day uprising in April 2004 that left 14 inmates dead, many of them hacked to death and tossed from the prison's roof. Prisoners held hostage about 170 relatives then, most of them women.

This time, the inmates said they would release the hostages after one of their leaders, Edinildo Paula de Souza, who had been transferred to another facility last week, was returned to Urso Branco.

"We agreed to return Edinildo as soon as the hostages were released and after a complete search for weapons and drugs," Renato Eduardo de Souza, head of the state's public safety department, said today.

"But they refused, demanding that Edinildo be returned first." Edinildo Paula de Souza, 27, is considered a highly dangerous criminal and is serving a 30-year sentence for murder and armed robbery. Local media have reported that de Souza, no relation to the public safety official, orchestrated the 2004 riot at Urso Branco.

Renato Eduardo de Souza said negotiations should resume in a few hours. "Let's hope they keep their promise and release the hostages." He said 190 women and 17 men, all of them relatives of the inmates, are being held hostage. There was no confirmation of the inmates' claim that they have killed at least 10 other prisoners during the rebellion, he said.

Referring to TV footage showing a group of inmates holding what they said was the body of a dead prisoner upside down from one of the prison's water towers, he said "it was ploy to intimidate us because as they pulled him back up he moved. He was clearly alive."

Authorities have cut off water and electricity supplies and are withholding food from the rioters at Urso Branco, a facility that was built to house 350 inmates, but currently holds about 1,200.

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