

## FBI Arrests Two Brazilian Bishops in Miami

Contributed by José Wilson Miranda  
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Bishops Estevam Hernandes Filho and Sônia Haddad Moraes, the couple who founded the Brazilian church Renascer, were arrested today at dawn in the Miami airport by the FBI after arriving in a flight from São Paulo, Brazil.

They were carrying US\$ 56,000 in cash in a briefcase even though they had declared to US customs to have only US\$ 10,000 with them, which is the maximum value in cash foreigners are allowed to bring into the United States.

São Paulo's public attorney office informed that Hernandes and Moraes will be investigated for money laundering by American authorities.

Brazil's Gaeco (Special Action Group for the Repression of Organized Crime) had asked the help of the US police to make the arrest. The church founders are being probed in Brazil for alleged tax embezzlement, gang formation, fraud and ideological falsehood.

The couple was in the FBI's blue alert list, indicating that the church founders, who have properties in the United States, were being sought to answer questions dealing with US interests.

It's expected that the Renascer bishops will post bail to get out of prison, but they might have to remain up to two weeks in the US while they explain where they got the undeclared money they were carrying.

Just last month, Hernandes and Moraes, then fugitives, were able to overturn at the Superior Justice Tribunal, an appellate court, a preventive arrest request against them. Now, the Brazilian Public Attorney Office should file a new request asking for the arrest of the bishops.

The prosecution says that they are not releasing any more information on the case at this time because the lawsuit against the couple being conducted in camera proceeding.

The Renascer church, a neopentecostal protestant denomination, was founded in 1986 and has 1.500 temples all across Brazil and overseas. The church's whole name is Igreja Apostólica Renascer em Cristo (To Be Reborn in Christ Apostolic Church).

As any other religious institution in Brazil, Renascer is exempt from paying income taxes. The church owns TV network Rede Gospel, and several radio stations. March for Jesus, a movement led by Renascer, has gathered 3 million faithful on the streets of São Paulo in 2006.