
Journalist Executed in Brazil with 8 Shots to the Head

Contributed by Newsroom
Monday, 12 February 2007

International pro-free-press organization Reporters Without Borders voiced dismay on learning that freelance photographer Robson Barbosa Bezerra was gunned down on the evening of February 8 as he was returning home in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

The organization expressed its condolences to the family and urged the Brazilian police to investigate the possibility that he was killed in connection with his work.

"If it is confirmed that the motive was linked to his work, Barbosa will be the eighth journalist to be killed in connection with their professional activity since 2002," the press freedom organization said.

"Brazil continues to be dangerous for independent, local journalists. While not ignoring his police record and personal conflicts, we urge investigators not to rule out a professional motive. Barbosa believed he was under threat and his murder looks like a contract killing."

Barbosa, 41, was killed at around 8 pm as he was returning to his home in the north Rio de Janeiro district of Abolição. He was parking his car when gunmen fired eight times, hitting him in the head.

Police found 1,600 reais (US\$ 758) in cash, a gold-plated ring and his watch on the body, as well as his credit card and personal documents including a National Federation of Journalists (FENAJ) membership card. This rules out theft as a motive.

Barbosa had reported receiving threats and being attacked a few days before his murder. While not so far ruling out that it was connected to his journalistic work, the police have pointed out that he had a police record.

In December, he was arrested in the course of physically attacking his former wife, Renata Mathias. As well as being prosecuted for conjugal violence, a complaint was lodged against him after a recent altercation with a colleague.

The O Globo newspaper reported that police inspector Carlos Gomes questioned his mother, his sister, the caretaker of the building where he had his office, and a fourth person who has not been identified.