
After Robbery Ordeal, Wife of Brazil's Finance Minister Refuses to Go to Police

Contributed by Elma Lia Nascimento
Monday, 26 February 2007

Brazil's Finance Minister, Guido Mantega, who was held hostage for over four hours, last week, during Carnival, while three gunmen negotiated a US\$ 10,000 loot after having invaded a friend's house where he was staying, is still refusing to talk about his ordeal.

His wife, psychoanalyst Eliane Mantega, who was with him, broke the silence, however, in an interview to O Globo, a daily from Rio de Janeiro.

The minister's wife said they are avoiding the subject and refusing to be interviewed to limit their exposition to the media and to spare their 6-year-old son, who was with them, but apparently slept throughout the dramatic experience.

Eliane called the robbers "chicken thieves" who could not even drive a car and had to be taken to a nearby neighborhood after they got their money.

While witnesses have told police that the minister and everybody else in the house - some 20 people - had to hand over their money and valuables, Mrs Mantega said that nobody else besides their host was robbed.

Eliane told o Globo that the hooded gunmen were very considerate with everybody and even separated the house employees from the affluent guests saying that they wouldn't steal from people as poor as themselves. She insisted that the gunmen were "superkind" to everybody and found a socioeconomic explanation for what happened:

"It's no use to keep talking about the case and exposing ourselves. What is needed is that Brazil improves the police, the economy, in order to reduce poverty and violence. There was nothing serious, it's the press that's creating factoids, writing lies. It was nothing serious, just this thing about violence, which is widespread."

Mantega and his host, Vítor Garcia Sandri, have been criticized for trying to conceal from the police what went on in the Ibiúna ranch - 40 miles from São Paulo city - where they were spending Carnival together.

The robbery went on from about 11 pm of Tuesday, February 13, to around 4 am the next day, but the police were only notified on Friday. According to the minister's wife, Guido Mantega only didn't report the incident to the police because he had a scheduled meeting with President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in Brasília.

"Guido needed to go to Brasília because he had a meeting with Lula. We only managed to leave the ranch around 6 am. We got to São Paulo at 9 am, without any sleep, and his flight was leaving at noon."

Eliane also denied information given to the police by one employee that she had been forced to accompany the house owner when he was taken by one of the gunmen to get the money they wanted.

"This is a lie," she says. "Just another factoid. We never left the house."

It isn't clear until now if Sandri had the cash available at his home in São Paulo or if he had to withdraw money via ATM from several bank accounts until he gathered the required 20,000 reais or about US\$ 9,600.

Mrs. Mantega also revealed that their 6-year-old kid, who was sleeping by her side, was never bothered by the robbers. And explained the reason for their secrecy: "We didn't want our children to know, or to be exposed. We don't like this scandal in the press, this is very bad for our children. And, actually, nothing happened, everyone is OK."

The minister's wife said that she has no intention to go to the police, not even to recognize the suspects. "I don't want to identify anyone," she said giving vent to her frustration. "We had enough of this."

On Friday the Ibiúna police arrested three suspects who are being charged with robbing several ranches in the area. Sandri went to the police station but said that he could not recognize the men caught by the police as the gunmen who robbed his house:

"I'm still very shaken with all that happened. But I believe that they are not the same robbers who invaded my property."