

## Brazil Breaks Ring That Guaranteed Students Place in Medical Colleges

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Monday, 30 April 2007

The Brazilian Federal Police announced this Monday, April 30, the end of its nine-month-old operation Vaga Certa (Guaranteed Place), which broke a national ring specialized in selling a place to the most coveted courses in Brazilian public and private colleges. At least 30 students are being charged with entering college, most of them in medical and odontological courses, through fraud.

Police chief Lorenzo Pompilho informed that more than 50 federal agents took part in the operation that arrested seven people, two of them in Rio de Janeiro and other five in the northeastern state of Ceará.

The scheme was in place since 2004. Rio state's prosecutor office announced that the bank accounts of those involved have been blocked and that they will be charged with fraud, falsification of public documents and gang formation. The police still haven't arrested all those implicated in the case though.

Among the schools that had their entrance exams defrauded are Universidade Gama Filho, Fundação Educacional Severino Sombra, Fundação Municipal de Saúde da Prefeitura de Petrópolis, Universidade Federal Fluminense, all from Rio de Janeiro and Universidade Federal de Pelotas, in the state of Rio Grande do Sul. Ten other public universities are also being investigated.

According to Brazilian authorities, the gang used college students, whom they called pilots, to take the vestibular (entry exam) test - which is the way Brazil colleges select their students - in place of the real candidate.

These pilots would get about 6,000 reais (about US\$ 3,000) for each student who was approved. The big money, however, went to the ring leaders who made from US\$ 12,500 to US\$ 35,000 for each student they guaranteed a place in college.

The police believe that up to 50 students benefited from this scheme to get into college. Half of them got into a school in Ceará and the others in colleges in Rio, São Paulo, Minas Gerais and Paraná states.

All of them, the police say, will be prosecuted and will have to forego the college place they fraudulently obtained. From the information gathered by the authorities there is still no evidence that the colleges themselves or their employees were part of the plot.

Olavo Vieira de Macedo from Ceará has been pointed as the ring's leader. He graduated in Law from Ceará's Federal University, is enrolled as a medical student at Fortaleza's University (Unifor) and has already registered for the entry

exam to Unifor's odontology course. His mother, Maria de Fátima Vieira de Macedo, is said to be the ring's accountant.

Among pilots, the police arrested Aline Saraiva Martins and Marisa Bandeira de Araújo. Both are medical students at Ceará's Federal University (UFC). In Rio, authorities detained the couple Anélio and Neide Alvarenga Cedaro. They are said to be the gang's middlemen, locating and arranging the college spots.

The federal police started to investigate the case in August. Using phone tapings authorities discovered that the ring operated mostly in vestibular exams that were prepared by the Cesgranrio Foundation, a group created in 1971 by 12 universities from Rio to unify the entry examinations in the Greater Rio.

The police seized with the gang a machine that was used to make fraudulent documents. They also got hold of reports that were prepared by the pilots and contained information on how the test was done. This information was given to the students who had paid for the pilots to take the tests for them.