

## Brazil's First Brother Caught in Police's Latest Anti-Corruption Operation

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Among the catches of Operation Checkmate, Brazilian Federal Police's latest anticorruption raid, was Brazil president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's older brother, Genival Inácio da Silva, better known as Vavá. He's been charged with traffic of influence and abuse of prestige.

The opposition in Brazil is using this to pan the Lula administration and its allies who seem to be engulfed in a bottomless corruption well. Cases of corruption in government have been succeeding with distressing frequency for several years now.

Arlindo Chinaglia, the House speaker, who is from the ruling Workers Party (PT), believes that the involvement of the first brother will give the opposition enough ammunition for weeks to come.

"It is predictable that there will be political squabble around the matter," said Chinaglia. The speaker asked caution from the opposition asking them not to prejudge the case and reminding everyone that "investigation doesn't mean conviction."

For the speaker, it's up to the president's brother to defend himself from any accusation of crime made against him. "If Vavá has a problem, " said Chinaglia, "he will respond to the problem. He is a citizen."

And added: "I don't even know whether he is a member of the PT. But just because he is the president's brother, he becomes a drawing card and not for journalists alone."

Talking in New Delhi, India, where he went for a state visit, Lula told reporters that he doesn't believe his brother is involved with the gangs of smugglers, drug traffickers and slot machine Mafia, that the Federal Police just dismantled.

Said Lula, "I know my brother for 61 years and I doubt that my brother has any problem but, anyway, if the Federal Police did the investigation, the investigation has been done. That applies to anyone of the 190 million Brazilians."

According to people close to the president, Lula was surprised by the news and expressed irritation for not being told about the situation beforehand. Apparently, the Federal Police tried to warn the president about the imminent action against his brother, when it was 11 pm in New Delhi although 3:30 pm in Brasília, and were told that Lula was already sleeping.

On Monday, June 4, the police came to Vavá's house in São Bernardo do Campo, in the greater São Paulo, with a search and seizure warrant. They stayed for two hours searching for incriminating material.

"They didn't find anything, thanks God, and they went away," said Maria da Silva, wife of Vavá. Edson, Genival's son, also confirmed the police visit and said: "Nothing got out of my dad's house. He barely knows how to read or write."

Edson added that he was told by a policeman that there were some wiretaps that linked his father's name to people dealing with illegal slot machines. "That's just an old wives' tale. "My dad doesn't have any connection with slot machines, he doesn't do traffic of influence, let's stop all that."

Later, Vavá's son admitted that the authorities had taken a couple of papers. According to him, two résumés and a letter asking for a job, which were on a pile of other documents.

The opposition is urging a rigorous investigation of all the facts. The DEM's leader in the House, Onyx Lorenzoni, stated, "What's worrisome is the fact that the first family is being investigated. The president's comment that the investigations should go on is the minimum we should expect from a government's head."

The leader of the PSDB - another opposing political party - in the Senate, Arthur Virgílio, has vowed to take the matter to the senate floor: "I am impressed. I've never seen anything so deplorable in the political arena and in the Brazilian democracy," he stated.

Vice president José Alencar, who is Brazil's acting president while Lula is out of the country, came in defense of Lula's brother: "From what I know about Vavá he is not involved in these kinds of things."

For representative Chico Alencar, leader of the leftist party PSOL, people shouldn't expect too much from the latest police action: "Unfortunately, this will not be the checkmate that is going to end the dispute between the Mafias and the public institutions. We will need other chess games for that."

The Checkmate Operation used about 600 agents to nab 77 people in six states. Most of them, including police officers, lawyers and politicians were caught in Mato Grosso do Sul, but there were also people from São Paulo, Mato Grosso, Paraná, Rondônia and Minas Gerais.

One of those taken into custody, Dario Morelli Filho, a Lula's friend, has already been removed from his post at the Saned, the public sanitation company of Diadema, a city in the Greater São Paulo.

