

Arrests Made in Case of Journalists Tortured by Brazilian Police

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A Brazilian man arrested on suspicion of being a member of a militia that kidnapped and tortured, May 14, a reporter, a photographer and a driver of the "O Dia" newspaper in the Rio de Janeiro favela of Batan (in Realengo, in the city's west zone) was shown to the press last week by members of a police unit known as the Bureau for Repression of Organized Crime Actions (DRACO).

He was identified as Davi Liberato de Araújo, 32, also known as "02" because he is alleged to be second-in-command of the militia. Liberato, who is serving a jail sentence in which he is now periodically allowed out, claims he was in prison at the time of the kidnapping.

The police also announced that an arrest warrant had been issued for Odnei Fernando Silva, 35, a former prison guard and currently an inspector in the civilian police, on suspicion of heading the Batan militia. Also known as "01," "Dinei" and "Águia," (Eagle) Silva was previously imprisoned for homicide. He is on the run.

The DRACO reported that it was investigating the possibility that members of the military police were also involved in the Batan militia and that the militia used a clandestine cemetery.

The "O Dia" reporter who was one of the three people who were kidnapped has meanwhile claimed that, while being tortured, she recognized the voice of an assistant to Colonel Jairo, a member of the Rio de Janeiro state parliament. Jairo has denied having anything to do with the militia and condemns its activities.

Commenting on the arrest, international press organization Reporters Without Borders said that it welcomes the speed with which the investigation is progressing and hopes that the information provided by Liberato will enable the police to identify all those involved in the "O Dia" kidnapping. The organization added that it also hopes that Silva will be quickly found and arrested.