

Suspects confess to killing UK reporter and Indigenous guide in Brazil

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Employees of the National Indigenous Foundation protest over missing British journalist Dom Phillips and Brazilian Indigenous affairs specialist Bruno Pereira, in Brasilia, June 13 [File: Evaristo Sa/AFP]

Brasilia, June 15 (RHC)-- Two suspects have confessed to killing and dismembering British journalist Dom Phillips and Indigenous expert Bruno Pereira, Brazil's TV Globo reported on Wednesday, citing police sources, after the men went missing for over a week in Brazil's Amazon rainforest.

The federal police had said in a statement on Wednesday that they were still searching for Phillips and Pereira in what they described as a homicide investigation, following the arrest of two suspects in the case.

One of the two suspects confessed to police that they had killed Phillips and Pereira and gave the location of the bodies, CNN Brasil reported, citing police sources. Earlier, Band News reported a confession by both suspects.

Police took a masked and hooded man they described as a suspect out on the river where the men vanished, the Reuters and AP news agencies reported. Police did not comment on the reported confession.

The reports suggest a grim conclusion to a case that has raised global alarm, hanging over Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro at a regional summit last week and stirring concern in the British Parliament on Wednesday. Bolsonaro said on Wednesday afternoon he expected the case to be resolved "in coming hours."

Phillips, a freelance reporter who has written for the British-based publication the Guardian and the Washington Post, was doing research for a book on the trip with Pereira, a former head of isolated and recently contacted tribes at federal Indigenous affairs agency Funai.

They were in a remote jungle area near the border with Colombia and Peru called the Javari Valley, which is home to the world's largest number of uncontacted Indigenous people. The region has been invaded by illegal fishermen, hunters, loggers and miners, and police say it is a key route for drug trafficking.

Police have arrested two suspects in the investigation: fisherman Amarildo da Costa de Oliveira, known as "Pelado", and his brother Oseney da Costa de Oliveira, 41, or "Dos Santos."

The brothers were seen meeting on the Itacoai river just moments after Phillips and Pereira passed by on June 5th, a witness told police in a report seen by the Reuters news agency.

Amarildo was arrested last week on weapons charges and is being held while police investigate his involvement in the case. Oseney was taken into custody on Tuesday night.

The suspects' family have denied they had any role in the men's disappearance. Public defenders representing the brothers could not immediately be reached by Reuters for comment.

Rights groups and press freedom advocates have been calling on Brazilian authorities to step up their search for Phillips and Pereira.

Carlos Martinez de la Serna, program director at the watchdog Committee to Protect Journalists, last week urged Brazil to "redouble" efforts to find the two men. "There is a clear pattern of threats and attacks on journalists and activists in Brazil who document environmental issues and violations of Indigenous peoples' rights, and authorities have yet to put in place effective mechanisms for their protection," he said in a statement.

In an editorial published on June 8th, the Guardian also said "the response from the Brazilian authorities has been at best sluggish and underwhelming."



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