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Americas - Brazil

Foot-dragging

Concern that investigation could stall in Amazonian border journalist's murder

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Reporters Without Borders is concerned about apparent foot-dragging in the investigation into the radio journalist **Vanderlei "Wanderley" Canuto Leandro's** murder on 1 September in Tabatinga, a border town in the northwestern state of Amazonas. Canuto had accused mayor Samuel Beneguy in May of threatening him in connection with his work. Although no evidence has been produced against the mayor, the probable political motive could block the investigation.



"Political pressure has traditionally been powerful in the north and northeast and it often holds up the investigation in this kind of case or brings it to a complete halt," Reporters Without Borders said. "Canuto had clearly upset the local authorities by drawing attention on the air to financial irregularities in which they were implicated. Such audacity is extremely dangerous in regions characterized by corruption, organized crime and violence.

"We urge the Manaus federal police, who are already handling in the case, to speed up procedures, to examine the possibility of the murder being linked to the victim's work as a journalist and, if appropriate, to question the authorities in Tabatinga."

Aged 32, Canuto hosted a programme called "Sinal Verde" (Green Light) on *Radio Frontera*, a local station broadcasting in both Spanish and Portuguese that is located on the Peruvian side of the river border. He also headed Tabatinga's motorcycle taxi union, Sindimoto. He died instantly when unidentified gunmen on a motorcycle fired eight shots at him near his home on the night of 1 September.

According to the *Blog da Floresta* news website, Canuto had publicly accused the Tabatinga municipal government of illicit purchases and misappropriating school food – cases that are already the subject of judicial investigations.

On 6 May, he filed a complaint with the Amazonas state prosecutor's office in which he reported that Mayor Beneguy has accosted him in street and told him: "Death strikes easily in the border area." He subsequently reported being harassed by the mayor in the form of regular confiscation of motorcycle taxis belonging to Sindimoto. The mayor has denied these allegations.

Canuto's death brings to four the number of Brazilian journalists killed in apparent or probable connection with their work since the start of the year.
