

Gang leader's lawyer denies violence link

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SAO PAULO, Brazil - A sobbing attorney told lawmakers Tuesday she had not given gang members advance word of a police crackdown that prompted a wave of violence that left 172 people dead in one week.

The attorney Maria Cristina Rachado represents Marcos Willians Herbas Camacho, the leader of Sao Paulo's First Capital Command gang, which launched attacks on May 12 against police in and around the city.

Speaking before a congressional hearing in the capital Brasilia, she denied breaking the law by acquiring a tape of a supposedly secret May 10 congressional meeting in which police detailed plans to isolate jailed gang members.

Rachado told lawmakers she went with a sound technician to copy the tape but never heard its contents and gave it to another lawyer for the gang, Sergio Wesley da Cunha.

"I didn't pass on information to anyone," said Rachado, who maintained she had not spoken to her client since March. She broke down while contending she has been unjustly accused by politicians and the media. The hearing was carried live on television.

Da Cunha denied wrongdoing, testifying later that he believed he had obtained the tape legally because the sound technician agreed to make the copy. He also said he never revealed its contents to anyone.

Authorities say the unprecedented week of gang-inspired violence in this city of 18 million people erupted after gang members learned of the plans to isolate imprisoned leaders, who control many of Sao Paulo's teeming, notoriously corrupt prisons.

Brazilian media have reported that during the secret part of the May 10 meeting, police told lawmakers that they planned to reduce the power of gangs inside prisons by transferring hundreds of their members to a remote facility where they would not be able to use cell phones. But committee members who were present said the information was not that detailed.

The technician who copied the audio tape, Arthur Vinicius Pilastre Silva, said he did not know what was on it and let the lawyers determine the price. But after seeing the violence on television, he said he wondered whether he could have helped start it and called his superiors.

A day after the tape was copied, police began trying to isolate hundreds of gang members. But gang leaders reportedly were able to use cell phones to order their "soldiers" to kill police.

Center-right legislator Laura Carneiro alleged the lawyers broke the law by paying the sound technician the equivalent of \$87 for the tape, but Rachado and da Cunha both said they made no payment.

Some congressmen who were at the secret committee session said they did not think the leaked tape sparked the unprecedented week of violence. But others say it did contribute.

Also Tuesday, Sao Paulo state prosecutors said they had ordered police to turn over by Thursday a list of names of the 109 suspected criminals killed by authorities after the gang attacked. Human rights groups have demanded police release the information to determine whether innocent people were killed in the police response.

"This is a right for the family and friends of the victims," said Neide Alexandre, a spokeswoman for prosecutors. "When we were ruled by a dictator, it was common for the state to hide details of deaths. But now the government does not work like that."

Amnesty International's annual global report, issued Tuesday, roundly criticized Brazil's criminal justice system, adding fuel to claims that police meted out retribution on suspected criminals after authorities were attacked.

"Violations at the hands of the police, including extrajudicial executions, torture and excessive use of force, persisted across the country," said the report, which was written before the Sao Paulo violence. "Torture and ill-treatment were widespread in the prison system, where conditions were often cruel, inhuman or degrading."