

## **Brazilian Gang Seizes Reporter, Demands Prison Changes**

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SAO PAULO, Brazil, Aug. 13 -- A Brazilian gang kidnapped a television reporter and forced his station to broadcast a message Sunday demanding improvements in the state prison system.

The prison-based First Capital Command gang -- better known by its Portuguese initials, PCC -- has waged a war against the government in recent months, launching hundreds of attacks against government buildings and other properties throughout the state of Sao Paulo. The attacks began in protest of a plan to transfer gang leaders to a remote prison, but the gang's message broadcast on Globo television early Sunday decried the prisons' overall living conditions, health and legal services, and isolation policies.

"Brazil's penal system is actually a human deposit, in which human beings are thrown as if they were animals," the group stated in the video, which lasted more than three minutes.

On Saturday morning, Globo television reporter Guilherme Portanova, 30, and an unidentified technician were kidnapped after leaving a bakery near the station's offices in Sao Paulo. The technician was released in the evening with the copy of the message on a DVD, and he informed the network that Portanova would be killed if it was not broadcast.

The station, the most widely viewed in Brazil, broadcast the message early Sunday morning, but Portanova was still missing hours later.

Portanova had contributed to the station's coverage of the violence that first erupted in May, when inmates belonging to the gang launched rebellions in more than 70 state prisons and members outside the jails burned public buses and attacked public buildings and banks. Additional waves of violence flared in July and last week. More than 200 people have been killed, including suspected gang members shot by the police.

During the message broadcast Sunday, a man identifying himself as a gang member explained that the kidnapping was the most effective way the group could get its message to the government of Sao Paulo and its citizens.

"The state has the obligation and the duty to provide a minimal standard of living conditions to the prisoners," he stated. "We don't want any advantages or anything else that is not within our rights."

The PCC was formed in 1993 as a response to conditions in a crowded prison system in which inmates are often put in cells with no beds, blankets, soap or toothbrushes. The gang offered protection and basic necessities to new inmates, winning loyalty and expanding its ranks throughout Brazil's largest state. According to interviews with prison guards in May, the PCC has successfully demanded better prison food, more familial visits and more television sets to watch the World Cup.

But since the gang began its attacks in May, the police have taken a harder line against it, periodically hunting down and shooting suspected PCC members in the slums of Sao Paulo. During the previous waves of violence, some of the gang's attacks were directed against police officers near their homes and at restaurants and bars known to be frequented by officers.

"Don't mess with our families, and we won't mess with yours," the PCC message said. "The fight is between you and us."