

US couple deny Brazil sex abuse charges

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SAO PAULO, Brazil --

A U.S. couple accused of sexually abusing minors at a nudist colony in southern Brazil deny the charges and don't understand why police arrested them earlier this week, one of their lawyers said Thursday.

"They are completely innocent," said Marcelo Peruchin, an attorney for Frederick Calvin Louderback, 63, and his girlfriend Barbara Anner, 54, who were detained on Tuesday.

Louderback is suspected of abusing at least 10 boys between the ages of 6 and 14, all from poor neighborhoods near the colony, according to police. Anner is alleged to have lured the boys with promises of gifts, food and trips.

"They were surprised by the police operation targeted at them," Peruchin said in a telephone interview.

Authorities raided the Colonia do Sol nudist colony in the state of Rio Grande do Sul on Tuesday with warrants to arrest the American couple and two Brazilians accused of helping them. The FBI helped Brazilian detectives, who seized laptops, photographs, a camera and DVDs.

The Brazilians - one of whom is Andre Herdy, president of the Brazilian Nudism Federation - also denied the charges through their attorney.

"There's no evidence they did anything, it's an enormous misunderstanding," lawyer Paulo Alves said.

Authorities said the Americans ran a non-governmental organization that gave free English lessons to local children, and also promoted sports activities and donated products to poor families in the region.

The Zero Hora newspaper said Louderback and Anner rarely mingled with other members of the nudist colony, but were admired by residents of a village near the colony.

"Until they prove something, he's very innocent," Marino Jose da Silva, whose two young daughters attended the English classes run by the Americans, told the newspaper. "He always provided education, clothes, notebooks and shoes for the kids."

Another resident, Valdirene Alves da Silva, said the couple took children to doctors and dentists and always gave away presents.