

Pentecostal Pastor Mediates Riot

Authorities credit Marcos Pereira da Silva with bringing an end to a three-day prison revolt in Brazil that left 31 dead

A controversial Pentecostal pastor is credited with ending a three-day riot at the Benfica detention center in Rio de Janeiro that left at least 30 inmates and one guard dead in late May, the Associated Press (AP) reported.

After calling in representatives from the Roman Catholic Church to negotiate peace, police allowed in Marcos Pereira da Silva, pastor of the Assembly of God of the Last Days, located outside Rio de Janeiro, three days after the riot began.

Popular among gangs and known for mediating riots, Da Silva persuaded inmates to release the remaining hostages in exchange for a promise that prison guards would separate detainees from rival gangs, the New York Times said.

"If the pastor didn't resolve this, the police would have stormed the place ... and the tragedy would have been much greater," Astirio Pereira dos Santos, the head of Rio's prison authority, told GloboNews, the Times reported.

The uprising began May 29 when inmates attempted to escape. When authorities tried to stop them, prisoners attacked the guards, took their guns and held 26 guards and staff hostage. Authorities said bodies were decapitated, mutilated and burned, the Times reported.

Rebellions are common in Brazilian prisons, which are often criticized for overcrowding and abuse, the AP said. The bloodshed at Benfica marked the worst prison riot since 1992, when police killed more than 100 inmates at Carandiru prison in Sao Paulo, the Times said.