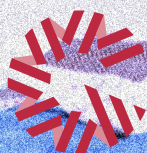


OPERATION CONTAINMENT

Analysis of Operation Containment, the deadliest in Rio de Janeiro's history, under international standards on the use of force and investigation of deaths



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Introduction

This report aims to systematize and analyze, from a legal, technical, and human rights perspective, the available information on *Operation Containment*, launched on October 28, 2025, in the favelas of Complexo do Alemão and Complexo da Penha in the city of Rio de Janeiro. The operation, presented by the state government as the largest repressive effort ever undertaken against a drug-trafficking faction, resulted in 121 deaths – 117 civilians and 4 police officers – as well as 99 arrests and 122 firearms seized, making it the deadliest police operation in Brazil's history.

Given the scale of the lethality, the diffuse profile of the victims, and the inconsistencies in the official justifications, a rigorous examination is required under international parameters on the use of force and the investigation of potentially unlawful deaths – particularly the United Nations Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials (BPUFF, 1990) and the Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death (2016). These instruments, which belong to the normative framework of international human rights law, establish positive obligations of legality, necessity, proportionality, diligence, transparency, and accountability, binding States to strict standards of control over police use of lethal force.

The present analysis reveals a pattern of institutional noncompliance that goes beyond isolated operational failures. Based on official documents, public statements, and observations from the Public Defender's Office of the State of Rio de Janeiro, the Ombudsman's Office, federal bodies, and international human rights mechanisms, the report identifies:

1. the direct involvement of the state Public Prosecutor's Office in the planning of the operation, compromising the independence of subsequent investigations;
2. the exclusion of the Public Defender's Office and federal bodies from the stages of forensic examination and autopsy supervision;
3. the absence of interinstitutional coordination between state and federal levels in the collection and custody of evidence;
4. the criminalization of family members and residents who assisted in the removal of bodies left behind after the operation;
5. the lack of compliance with international standards on the use of force, preservation of the crime scene, integrity of evidence, and the victims' right to the truth.



The report also contextualizes the institutional tensions that emerged after the operation, including the preliminary decision by the National Council of the Public Prosecutor's Office (CNMP) that suspended the joint action of the Federal Public Prosecutor's Office (MPF) and the Public Defender's Office of the Union (DPU), revealing a pattern of organizational insularity and resistance to external scrutiny.

Rather than an isolated event, Operation Containment represents a turning point in the debate on public security, civilian oversight, and police accountability in Brazil. Investigating its circumstances and consequences is essential not only to ensure the accountability of the agents and institutions involved, but also to reaffirm the Brazilian State's commitments to the right to life, truth, and justice, enshrined in the Federal Constitution and in international human rights treaties ratified by the country.

In summary, this document seeks to contribute to the memory, critical analysis, and democratic oversight of state agencies tasked with the use of force, providing a technical and legal reading of the facts in light of the international obligations undertaken by Brazil and the minimum standards of an independent, effective, and transparent investigation.





I. Description of the Operation

1. CONTEXT AND PLANNING

The detailed planning of the mega-operation in the favelas of Complexo do Alemão and Complexo da Penha was presented mainly by public security authorities of the State of Rio de Janeiro, with additional remarks from federal authorities regarding the involvement of the Federal Police.

According to the State Secretary of Civil Police, Police Commissioner Felipe Curi^[1], the operation was entirely based on an investigation conducted by the Drug Enforcement Division (DRE), which spanned over a year. Chief Moysés Santana was reportedly in charge of the investigation. Tactical and operational planning lasted for 60 days, a period marked by daily meetings between Civil and Military Police teams. According to Curi, the intelligence work was meticulously devised, leading to the identification of individuals who had no prior criminal record and had remained “off the radar” of police operations.

According to state authorities, the planning also reportedly involved the participation of the Public Prosecutor’s Office. Governor Cláudio Castro^[2] stated that he feels “very much at ease” defending all actions taken during the operation, emphasizing that the planning involved the Public Prosecutor’s Office of the State of Rio de Janeiro.

“(…) what happened yesterday was an operation to execute a judicial warrant, over a year of investigation, and more than 60 days of planning that included the Public Prosecutor’s Office.”

Claudio Castro, Governor of Rio de Janeiro.

2. JUDICIAL WARRANTS AND DESIGNATED TARGETS

In response to the information request issued by the National Human Rights Council and ordered by Minister Alexandre de Moraes, the State of Rio de Janeiro informed the Supreme Federal Court that *Operation Containment* had as its main objective the execution of 51 arrest warrants and 145 search and seizure warrants issued by the 42nd Criminal Court of the Capital, within the

[1] Complete recording of the Rio de Janeiro Security Summit press conference. November 29, 2025. Available at: https://youtu.be/E4kB_SbTzDc?si=1fRi8uMkliy11iCz

[2] Complete recording of Cláudio Castro’s press conference presenting the operation’s results. November 29, 2025. Available at: <https://youtu.be/sYeETQKKhdg?si=T9dN4krwO4WNHLGH>



scope of an investigation into the activities of the Comando Vermelho faction in the Penha Complex.

According to the information provided, the operation also aimed to execute 19 arrest warrants against fugitives allegedly hiding in the area, in addition to 30 arrest warrants issued by the Judiciary of the State of Pará – totaling 100 arrest warrants under the responsibility of the public security agents.

Authorities stated that the targeted addresses had been determined based on “intelligence data and precise geolocation.”

“All the addresses targeted in yesterday’s operation were based on intelligence and investigative data, with absolute certainty, supported by geolocation, that these were residences used by narcoterrorists operating within the Comando Vermelho criminal organization and in the favelas of Complexo do Alemão and Complexo da Penha.”

Felipe Curi, Police Commissioner and State Secretary of Civil Police.

3. SECURITY FORCES INVOLVED

In the document submitted to the Supreme Federal Court, the State of Rio de Janeiro stated that the operation—triggered by complaints filed by the State Public Prosecutor’s Office—was jointly planned by the State Secretariat of Civil Police (SEPOL), the State Secretariat of Military Police (PMERJ), and the Public Prosecutor’s Office itself, through its Special Action Group to Combat Organized Crime (GAECO/MPRJ).

The mobilization involved approximately 2,500 law enforcement officers from both the Civil and Military Police, as well as specialized units such as the Special Police Operations Battalion (BOPE), the Shock Battalion, the Canine Operations Battalion (BAC), and the Police Operations Coordination Unit (CORE) of the Civil Police.

According to the State Government, “distributed among the security forces, approximately 650 Civil Police officers and 1,800 Military Police officers participated, using standard-issue weapons (5.56 mm and 7.62 mm rifles; .40 caliber pistols).” The report also stated that “advanced tactical and technological resources were employed, including drones, two observation helicopters (used for support and coordination), 32 armored ground vehicles, and 12 demolition vehicles from the Special Operations Support Unit of the Military Police.”

The infiltration of BOPE officers into the forested area, described as a tactical innovation, was highlighted as a distinguishing feature of this operation compared to previous ones.



At the federal level, Governor Cláudio Castro stated that he felt “very much at ease” in defending the operation, claiming that the planning involved the participation of the Public Prosecutor’s Office. The Minister of Justice, Ricardo Lewandowski, and the Director-General of the Federal Police, Andrei Rodrigues, however, confirmed that no formal communication regarding the operation’s launch had been made to higher-ranking federal authorities. The Federal Police and the Federal Highway Police were mentioned only in the context of coordination and information exchange with state forces, without direct participation in the incursion.

4. OBJECTIVES AND OPERATIONAL STRATEGY

The operation began at around 6:00 AM on November 28, 2025, and lasted until 9:00 PM, focusing on the favelas of Complexo do Alemão and Complexo da Penha, which, according to authorities, served as the national headquarters of the Comando Vermelho (CV – Red Command). Official statements framed the action as a legitimate operation to enforce judicial orders and protect the civilian population. According to Police Commissioner Felipe Curi and the Secretary of Public Security, Victor Santos, the tactical plan was purportedly designed to cause “the least possible harm or disturbance to residents.”

The strategic maneuver, described as a form of “asymmetric warfare,” sought to corner individuals allegedly linked to the Comando Vermelho and drive them into the wooded area, particularly in the Serra da Misericórdia, in a location known as Vacaria. Authorities asserted that the troops took on “greater risk” to reduce harm to civilians, though the results tell a different story.

5. OFFICIAL RESULTS

Data submitted by the State Government to the Supreme Federal Court indicates that Operation Containment resulted in 99 individuals arrested or detained, of whom 17 were apprehended under judicial warrants and 82 caught in flagrante delicto.

Regarding the origin of those detained, the State reported that among the 17 arrested under warrants, 7 were from Rio de Janeiro, while the others came from Espírito Santo (1), Santa Catarina (2), Bahia (6), and Pernambuco (1). Among the 82 individuals arrested in flagrante, there were persons from Bahia (17), Espírito Santo (1), Pernambuco (3), Pará (5), Maranhão (1), Paraíba (1), and Santa Catarina (1). Among the detained adolescents, one was from Bahia.

As for the weapons seized, the report records 122 firearms and accessories, including 96 rifles, 25 pistols, and 1 revolver, along with 260 magazines



and approximately 5,600 rounds of ammunition. Authorities also confiscated 12 explosive devices.

Regarding the victims, the State reported the deaths of 117 civilians, officially described in the document as “neutralized opponents,” in addition to 4 police officers killed. There were also 13 injured state agents (5 from the Civil Police and 8 from the Military Police), 4 civilians wounded, and 2 individuals injured and later arrested. The State further noted that among the 117 deceased, individuals were identified from several states, including Espírito Santo, São Paulo, Bahia, Paraíba, Ceará, Maranhão, Amazonas, Pará, and Goiás.

The high lethality of the operation, the most violent in the history of the state of Rio de Janeiro, has raised serious questions about the legality and proportionality of the use of force. The situation at the Forensic Medical Institute (IML) and the delay in identifying the bodies, as well as the participation of the state Public Prosecutor’s Office in the planning of the operation, underscore the need for an independent investigation into the circumstances of the deaths and the operation’s command and control structure.





II. Forensic Procedures and Investigations

The Forensic Medical Institute (IML) received the bodies of the individuals killed in the operation, officially classified by state authorities as “neutralized,” totaling 121 victims, of whom 117 were identified as alleged “narcoterrorists” and four as police officers.

The Minister of Justice, Ricardo Lewandowski, announced that federal assistance would be provided for the Rio de Janeiro forensic investigation, including the deployment of forensic experts and medical examiners from the Federal Police and the National Force, as well as the use of national DNA and ballistics databases. The stated purpose was to assist in identifying the bodies and in determining the circumstances of the deaths through the use of federally managed technological and forensic resources.

State authorities acknowledged the difficulty in identifying the victims due to the presence of people from other states. Of the 99 detainees, 39 were reportedly from other states, underscoring the need to cross-check biometric and genetic data with the Federal Police’s National Identification Institute systems. The Secretary of Public Security, Victor Santos, also emphasized the importance of forensic analysis to trace the 118 seized weapons, including ballistic comparisons of the recovered projectiles and comparison with the National Ballistics Database, in order to determine the origin and route of these weapons.

State authorities declared that the forensic process would follow rigorous protocols, including post-mortem examinations, photographs, X-rays, and residue tests (gunshot residue test on hands). According to the state government, all forensic examinations were monitored by the Public Prosecutor’s Office of the State of Rio de Janeiro. Governor Cláudio Castro declared that “all the forensic and oversight work related to the operation is fully accessible to oversight institutions,” ensuring that the investigations will proceed with “with maximum transparency.”

However, the official narrative of transparency was quickly called into question. The Public Defender’s Office of the State of Rio de Janeiro reported that it was prevented from accessing the IML to monitor the forensic procedures, in violation of its institutional prerogative to oversee such activities, which is guaranteed by its role as *custos vulnerabilis* under ADPF 635 (ADPF of the Favelas). The institution took the matter to the Supreme Federal Court, claiming the right to oversee the evidence-gathering process and to ensure an “independent counter-examination” in light of the serious nature of the events, thus safeguarding its institutional prerogatives.



The complaints from residents and family members, coupled with the high lethality of the operation, increased public scrutiny over the forensic and investigative work. The forensic examinations thus became a key element in reconstructing the events and determining the legality of the use of lethal force by the State. The planned collaboration between state and federal agencies would be the essential link to ensure technical independence, integrity of evidence, and complete identification of victims, preventing the high number of deaths and the conditions of violence from being overlooked due to the lack of accountability that has historically plagued large-scale police operations in Rio de Janeiro.

The main temporal discrepancy between state and federal actions in the context of Operation Containment reveals deep tensions between operational speed and the duty of diligence that should govern investigations in cases of high police lethality.

While the federal government announced on the afternoon of October 30th the deployment of criminal and forensic experts from the Federal Police and the National Force to support the investigations, the Civil Police of Rio de Janeiro had already reported on the same day that around 100 bodies had been autopsied. This time gap – of only a few hours between the federal announcement and the completion of most autopsies – suggests that the state forensic work was conducted at a fast pace, without prior coordination with federal technical support.

This overlap in timing raises a central question: did the speed of the state's actions represent efficiency or was it a strategy of institutional isolation aimed at undermining federal collaboration? The large-scale execution of autopsies in under 48 hours after the deadliest operation in Rio de Janeiro's recent history is a fact that, although presented as a sign of competence, may also suggest an attempt to consolidate evidence under the exclusive control of local authorities, reducing the possibility of independent review.

From a technical perspective, the delayed deployment of federal experts also compromises the stated purpose of "assisting with crime scene, ballistics, and forensic genetics analysis." The operation took place on Tuesday (28), but federal support was not officially confirmed until two days later, when the crime scene had already been significantly altered. In the meantime, neighbors and relatives of the missing persons, searching for their loved ones, came across dozens of dead bodies in the wooded area. In the absence of immediate assistance, forensics, or support from the public authorities, they took it upon



themselves to move the bodies and lay them out on in the street. The Public Defender's Office warned that this situation "made a quality forensic examination impossible," as crucial ballistics, residue, and positional evidence needed to reconstruct the events had already been compromised.

From the perspective of the principle of due diligence, the delay in coordinated action between state and federal authorities may have caused irreversible damage to the chain of custody of the evidence. Forensic analysis, by definition, depends on the integrity of the scene and the chronology of trace evidence. When federal intervention occurs only after bodies and evidence have been handled, the question remains as to which stage of the process it can still effectively impact, and whether its role will be limited to reviewing reports already produced, without direct access to primary sources.

Furthermore, the delay directly affects the identification of bodies, especially those from other states (Pará, Amazonas, Bahia, Ceará, Goiás, Espírito Santo, Mato Grosso, São Paulo, and Paraíba) whose families face logistical and financial challenges to reach Rio de Janeiro. Although federal support included experts in forensic genetics and DNA databases, the delay in integrating this resource meant that the initial phase of autopsies and collection of biological samples was conducted under the exclusive control of state teams. This could compromise both the accuracy of identifications and the transparency of the results for the families and authorities from other states.

In summary, the mismatch between the state's rapid actions and the delayed federal intervention should not be interpreted merely as a difference in pace, but as a sign of institutional lack of coordination that undermines the credibility of the investigative process. The lack of synchrony between the federative entities creates a vacuum in external oversight precisely at the most sensitive moment – that of the initial collection of evidence – turning speed into a potential mechanism for evading independent supervision. Therefore, rather than demonstrating efficiency, the haste with which the State of Rio de Janeiro conducted the autopsies may represent a form of institutional shielding in the face of imminent federal oversight, compromising the principle of due diligence and the right to truth of the victims and their families.

The situation has grown even more alarming after the Public Defender's Office of the State of Rio de Janeiro was prevented from monitoring the forensic examinations conducted at the Forensic Medical Institute. The Public Defender's Office sought to exercise its prerogative to observe and produce technical counterevidence, with the support of its own team of experts and assistants but was denied access on the grounds of administrative restrictions.



As a result, the only technical body allowed to monitor the forensic examinations was the State Public Prosecutor's Office, the same body that, according to public statements from top security officials of Rio de Janeiro, took part in the planning and prior supervision of the operation. This circumstance seriously undermines the impartiality and credibility of the forensic work, since oversight was restricted to an institution that, far from acting as an independent control body, was directly involved in the preparatory stages of the police action.

On this point, it is observed that the very document submitted by the State to the Supreme Federal Court confirms the direct and continuous participation of the Public Prosecutor's Office of the State of Rio de Janeiro (MPRJ) in all stages of Operation Containment – from the drafting of the complaints that supported the warrants to the on-site monitoring of police actions.

“The operation was previously authorized and formally communicated to the competent authorities, with records of both the initiation and conclusion communications filed with the Public Prosecutor's Office of the State of Rio de Janeiro. In this regard, it is further noted that members of the State Public Prosecutor's Office assigned to GAECO directly accompanied all operational phases. The complaints that supported the warrants were also filed by GAECO/MPRJ, demonstrating the prior and continuous involvement of the Public Prosecutor's Office, in accordance with ADPF No. 635 and SEPOL Resolution No. 858/2025.”

This information is particularly relevant as it reveals the lack of separation between the prosecutorial function and the external control of police activity, both constitutionally assigned to the Public Prosecutor's Office. By accompanying and endorsing the execution of the operation, the MPRJ ceases to act as an independent oversight body, thereby compromising its ability to subsequently investigate potential abuses or extrajudicial executions committed by security forces.

The exclusion of the Public Defender's Office, coupled with the absence of an effective federal presence during the initial phases of the autopsy and ballistic analysis, consolidates a state monopoly of the production of evidence in the hands of the very institutions responsible for carrying out the operation. This arrangement weakens the guarantees of transparency, adversarial proceedings, and technical independence, essential pillars for the investigative process to meet the minimum parameters of diligence and external oversight provided for by the Inter-American human rights system.



Moreover, the preliminary injunction issued by the National Council of the Public Prosecutor's Office (CNMP) against the joint initiative of the Federal Public Prosecutor's Office (MPF) and the Federal Public Defender's Office (DPU), which had challenged the legality and conduct of the large-scale police operation in Rio de Janeiro, further aggravates this situation. Instead of fostering inter-federative cooperation and technical scrutiny over an operation of exceptional gravity, the episode ultimately consolidated a conflict of jurisdiction and institutional prestige, in which procedural disputes prevailed over the commitment to the public interest and the protection of fundamental rights.

The Official Letter PRRJ/PRDC No. 13207/2025, issued on October 28 – the very day of the operation – sought to obtain basic information regarding the police action's compliance with the measures imposed by the Supreme Federal Court in ADPF 635, including the use of cameras, ambulances, and protocols for civilian protection. The institutional response, however, was not one of interinstitutional cooperation or transparency, but of obstruction of oversight efforts. The Public Prosecutor's Office of the State of Rio de Janeiro (MPRJ) immediately filed a Complaint for the Preservation of the Autonomy of the Public Prosecutor's Office (RPAMP), and the CNMP, in a preliminary decision issued less than 48 hours later, suspended the effects of the federal letter, accusing the MPF of undue interference and overstepping its jurisdiction.

The practical outcome of this decision is doubly concerning. First, because it eliminates the possibility of independent oversight of an episode with a high potential for human rights violations, reinforcing the monopoly on legality control in the hands of the same state body that, according to the public security leadership's own admission, participated in planning the police operation. Second, because it transforms a jurisdictional dispute into a struggle for corporate affirmation, in which institutional zeal for “functional autonomy” outweighs the urgency of a technical and impartial investigation of the facts.

In this context, the suspension of the MPF's and DPU's participation cannot be understood as a measure of legal rationality, but rather as an expression of institutional insularity that prioritizes bureaucratic boundaries over cooperation in defense of legality and life. Although framed in formal arguments about jurisdiction, the CNMP's decision effectively weakens external control mechanisms and reinforces a pattern of corporate self-preservation. By excluding federal and human rights bodies from the process, the Brazilian justice system risks turning a massacre into an internal power struggle, diverting attention from what should be central: uncovering the truth, ensuring accountability, and providing justice for the victims.



III. Arrests and Warrants

The number of arrest warrants behind Operation Containment varies depending on the source and scope considered but converges around 100 judicial orders. Police Commissioner Felipe Curi, Secretary of Civil Police of Rio de Janeiro, stated that the operation was based on approximately 100 warrants, 70 of which were issued as part of the investigation conducted by the Drug Enforcement Division (DRE) and 30 from the Civil Police of Pará, within the framework of an interstate effort against Comando Vermelho. The formal indictment from the Special Action Group to Combat Organized Crime (GAECO/MPRJ), however, referred to 51 arrest warrants issued by the 42nd Criminal Court of the Capital, targeting members of the group operating specifically in the Penha neighborhood area. The Public Security Secretariat, in turn, echoed the figure of 100 warrants, aligning itself with the broader narrative of a comprehensive operation against Comando Vermelho and the simultaneous execution of the judicial orders.

This numerical discrepancy – between the 51 warrants directly linked to the GAECO’s indictment and the 100 cited as the overall objective of the operation – is relevant because it demonstrates a significant expansion of the operational scope beyond the judicial foundation that supported it. Although the Civil Police has insisted that the action was based on formal investigation and lawfully issued warrants, the expansion of the operation beyond its original targets suggests that the execution of the warrants served more as a formal justification for a militarized incursion than as a precise execution of judicial decisions.

The operation’s report reveals a profound discrepancy between the legal justification presented and the actual results obtained. In its first official statement, delivered during a press conference, the Civil Police announced 113 arrests, of which only 20 were said to be directly linked to judicial warrants. Subsequently, in the document submitted to the Supreme Federal Court, the State revised these figures, reporting 99 individuals arrested or detained, 17 of them under judicial warrants.

The remaining 82 arrests in flagrante delicto allegedly stemmed from armed confrontations, with accusations involving the possession of weapons, rifles, or explosive devices. This imbalance demonstrates that the vast majority of arrests were unrelated to the warrants that justified the operation, revealing an operational pattern characteristic of a territorial sweep rather than the targeted execution of specific judicial orders.



Additionally, the State recorded the detention of 10 adolescents without providing any information regarding the existence of warrants in their cases – a circumstance that further underscores the opacity and inconsistency in the oversight of the legality of the detentions carried out.

The same pattern of discrepancy is observed in the analysis of the fatalities. Of the 117 civilians killed during the operation, 109 had already been identified by October 31, 2025, and 42 had outstanding arrest warrants. However, according to Secretary Curi himself, these warrants were unrelated to the ongoing operation, meaning that none of the deceased were on the original target list in the GAECO indictment that prompted the operation. In a subsequent report, the Public Security Secretariat updated the figure to 43 fugitives killed, which does not alter the essential fact: the main judicial targets were not among the dead.

This finding carries serious implications. While the official narrative maintains that the operation's goal was to execute judicial arrest warrants, the data indicate that the warrants served as a formal pretext for a large-scale offensive marked by widespread lethality and diffuse targets. The gap between the warrants issued and the concrete outcomes highlights the instrumental use of the judicial mechanisms to legitimize an operation that was essentially punitive and militarized, rather than an action limited to the execution of specific judicial orders.

Furthermore, the high proportion of arrests in *flagrante delicto* – carried out under combat conditions and operational chaos – compromises the reliability of both the arrests and the chain of custody of the evidence. The fact that five individuals with warrants issued by the state of Pará voluntarily surrendered reinforces that the arrests resulting from the regular execution of warrants were residual when compared to the magnitude of the operation.

In summary, the analysis of the official figures demonstrates that Operation Containment exceeded the judicial limits that justified it. The discrepancy between the number of warrants issued, the number that was actually executed, and the profile of the people killed and arrested points to a shift in purpose, in which the execution of warrants functioned as a legal façade for a mass repression campaign. These findings warrant independent investigation into the proportionality and legality of the operation, as well as into any potential institutional responsibility for turning a judicial action into an extermination operation.



IV. Criminalization of Family Members and Residents

One of the most troubling developments of Operation Containment is the opening of a police investigation targeting residents and family members of the victims who helped remove the bodies on the morning following the operation. The investigation, according to the Secretary of Civil Police, Felipe Curi, was initiated by the 22nd Police Station (Penha) on suspicion of procedural fraud, under the argument that the handling of the bodies could have altered the crime scene and compromised the validity of the forensic examinations.

The Secretary of Public Security, Victor Santos, and Police Commissioner Felipe Curi, publicly stated that the authorities are investigating the alleged improper removal of corpses and alteration of the victims' clothing, which, according to them, were intended to "create a false narrative" and "undermine the credibility of the police operation." In official statements, Curi asserted that the bodies of alleged narcoterrorists, "retrieved from the woods dressed in camouflage clothing and bulletproof vests," had "later appeared only in underwear or shorts, barefoot," and questioned "who benefits from removing the tactical gear and leaving them in the middle of the street to attract attention." The Secretary also insinuated that any cutting injuries found on the bodies could have been inflicted after death, suggesting deliberate manipulation of the corpses.

This narrative of procedural fraud and evidence tampering was further reinforced by allegations that the vehicles used to move the bodies were stolen, a claim not supported by public evidence to date, and by attempts to link the residents' actions to an alleged disinformation strategy. As a result, the institutional response shifts the focus of accountability: instead of addressing the State's failure to preserve the crime scenes and ensure official removal of the bodies, the investigation turns against the residents themselves, who acted in the absence of state authorities, effectively shifting blame from institutions to civilians.

According to local reports, the removal of the bodies was carried out by residents of the favela of Complexo da Penha, who took the bodies to São Lucas Square. The initiative was described by the residents themselves as an act of desperation and public denunciation, given the abandonment of the corpses by the police and the absence of immediate forensic examination at the scene. The Deputy Secretary of Planning of the Civil Police, Police Commissioner Carlos

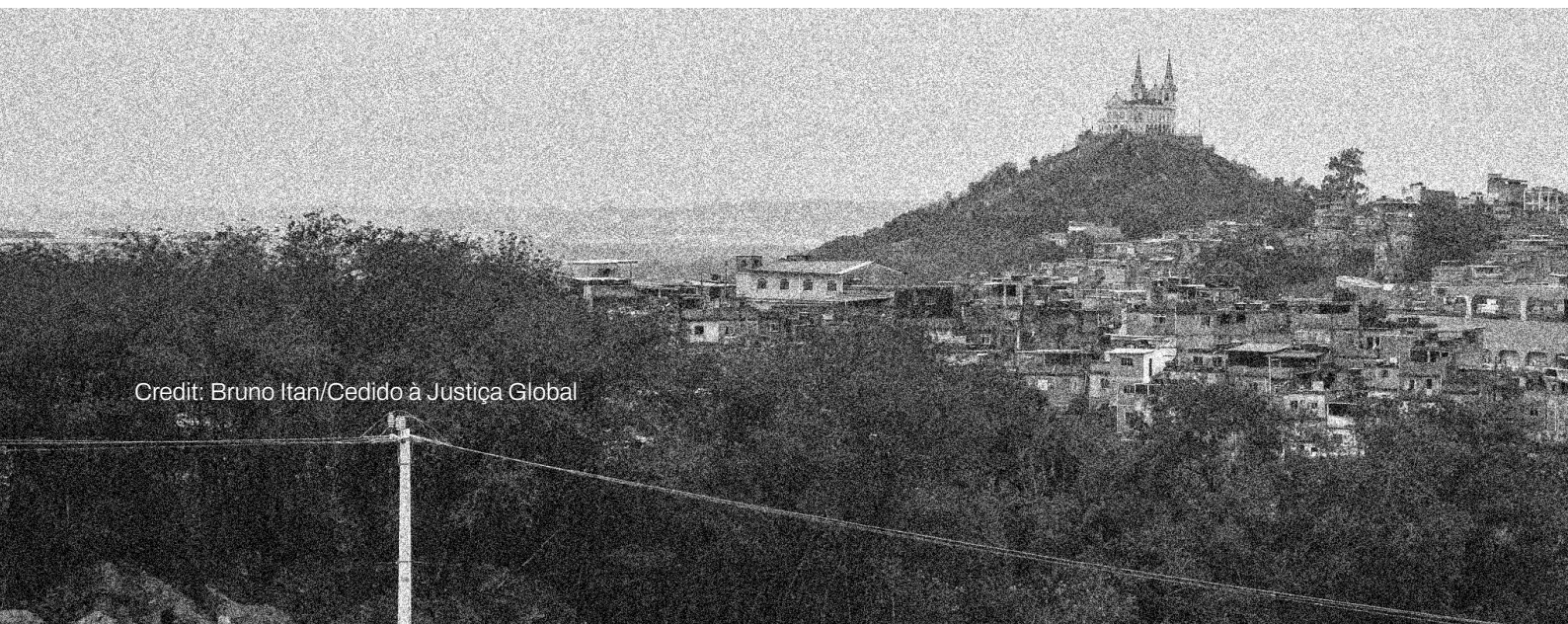


Oliveira, confirmed that the bodies had indeed been removed by residents and admitted that the police “were not even aware of their existence in the woods,” which demonstrates serious failures in coordination and crime scene control.

In contrast to the criminalization of the communities, United Nations experts expressed deep concern over the stance of Rio de Janeiro’s authorities. In a public statement, they expressed alarm at the threats of criminal prosecution directed at victims’ family members, residents, and human rights defenders who assisted in the recovery of the bodies and the documentation of the events. The experts emphasized that it is the State’s responsibility, not the civilian population’s, to guarantee the preservation of crime scenes and the proper collection of evidence, and that it is inappropriate to impute criminal liability to those who attempted to mitigate state negligence.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights issued a categorical statement urging Brazilian authorities to protect witnesses, relatives, and community members from reprisals and arbitrary prosecutions, noting that the absence of immediate forensic work and isolation of the area is a failure attributable solely to the public authorities. Shifting the narrative toward an alleged “procedural fraud” by residents, in this context, constitutes not only a moral inversion of State responsibility, but also a direct threat to the right to truth and memory of the victims.

This attempt to criminalize those who sought to recover the bodies of their relatives and neighbors amounts to a process of revictimization and social silencing, in clear contradiction to international standards for the protection of victims of State violence. Rather than acknowledging the State’s failure to ensure the integrity of crime scenes and dignified treatment of the dead, authorities have chosen to transform the humanitarian act of recovery into criminal suspicion, reinforcing a historical pattern of criminalizing favelas and their residents.





V. Racial Bias in Police Lethality

An analysis of Operation Containment, when situated within the broader context of State violence in Brazil, reveals not only a large-scale humanitarian tragedy, but also the concrete expression of a structural pattern of racial selectivity that permeates the public security system. The deaths that occurred in the favelas of Complexo da Penha and Complexo do Alemão cannot be read as isolated events, but rather as part of a historical mechanism that normalizes the extermination of Black youth living in favelas under the discourse of the “war on crime.”

According to the 2025 Brazilian Public Security Yearbook, 82% of people killed in police interventions in 2024 were Black (black and mixed-race [*pardos*]). The likelihood of a Black person being killed by security forces is 3.5 times higher than that of a white person, and 99% of the victims of such actions are men. These figures reiterate that police lethality in Brazil targets a defined color, territory, and class: it is systematically directed against Black, poor, and peripheral bodies.

In the case of Rio de Janeiro, this selectivity becomes even more pronounced. The favelas of Complexo do Alemão and Complexo da Penha, territories that are predominantly Black and marked by high social vulnerability, are the epicenters of recurring episodes of State violence. The Ombudsman of the Public Defender’s Office of the State of Rio de Janeiro, in its reports on ADPF 635, had already pointed out that the dead and wounded in these incursions are almost always young Black men – a “collection of Black bodies lined up in piles,” as described when referring to the scene of corpses in São Lucas Square.

These numbers consolidate what several international organizations, such as the UN, the IACHR, and the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, have already recognized: Brazil maintains a racially selective public security model, in which skin color defines the degree of risk to one’s life.

Operation Containment, therefore, is not a deviation, but the culmination of a security policy founded on the racialization of suspicion and the normalization of the death of Black people. The pattern of lethality, the absence of independent forensic work, and the criminalization of residents all point toward the same vector of dehumanization: the State that kills also seeks to silence those who denounce.

The normalization of the narrative of the operation’s “success,” widely disseminated by Governor Cláudio Castro and the state’s public security leadership,



is only possible because it is rooted in the structural racism that dehumanizes Black people. Authorities have repeatedly stated that among the 121 dead, “only four were victims.” The image of dozens of bodies lined up, which in any other context would be a symbol of horror, mourning, and violation, was presented as evidence of state efficiency. Such moral inversion can only be legitimized within a society that naturalizes violence against Black, poor bodies, and that treats the favelas as expendable zones.

The public acceptability of this lethality, reflected in institutional indifference, media coverage, and official discourse, depends on the persistence of a racialized imaginary that associates the Black body with criminality. Thus, the massacre becomes a “positive outcome” precisely because it takes place in nonwhite spaces.

This racial framing is not merely a backdrop, but the very symbolic and political foundation of the current security model: a model that transforms death into an indicator of success and legitimizes extermination as public policy. The rhetoric of war, “engagement,” “containment,” and “pacification” functions, in this sense, as a technology of racialization of the internal enemy, allowing the State to exercise mass lethal violence without compromising its self-image as the guardian of order.





VI. Violations of the Minnesota Protocol Standards

The Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death (2016) constitutes the international standard of excellence for investigating deaths that occur in custody or in contexts involving the use of force by State agents. Adopted by the United Nations, the document establishes clear parameters of diligence, independence, transparency, and respect for human dignity for conducting such investigations, especially when there are indications that the death may have resulted from State action or omission.

Given that Operation Containment resulted in the deaths of 117 civilian and four police officers, making it the deadliest police operation in the history of Rio de Janeiro, the State's duty to investigate was unequivocally triggered. The fulfillment of this duty, however, must comply with the five central pillars established by the Protocol: effectiveness, thoroughness, independence, transparency, and participation of the victims' families. Measured against these criteria, the available evidence points to significant inconsistencies, amounting to a violation of the minimum international standards established by the *Minnesota Protocol*.

1. FAILURE TO PRESERVE THE CRIME SCENE AND MAINTAIN THE CHAIN OF CUSTODY

The Protocol requires that the site of a potentially unlawful death must be secured as soon as possible to ensure the integrity of evidence, preventing contamination or loss of relevant material. In the case of this operation, this principle was flagrantly violated.

Residents and family members were forced to remove dozens of bodies from the wooded area (Serra da Misericórdia/Vacaria) after the absence of official rescue and forensic teams. The rescue involved dozens of corpses, which were later lined up in São Lucas Square. The Public Defender's Office reported that the police were not even aware of the existence of these bodies, evidencing an initial failure in preserving the scene and establishing the necessary perimeter for forensic collection.

Instead of acknowledging this omission, the authorities opened a criminal inquiry for "procedural fraud" against the residents, claiming that the removal of the victims' clothing had created a "false narrative." This shift in responsibility represents not only an attempt to reverse the burden of proof, but also a breach



in the chain of custody of the human remains, which the Protocol requires to be handled with extreme care and respect for human dignity.

2. LACK OF INDEPENDENCE AND IMPARTIALITY IN THE INVESTIGATION

The Minnesota Protocol establishes that investigations into deaths caused by State agents must be conducted by independent bodies external to the institutions potentially involved. However, the investigation into the lethality of the operation is under the responsibility of the Civil Police of the State of Rio de Janeiro, an institution directly involved in the action and subordinated to the same chains of command.

This configuration generates a clear institutional conflict of interest and compromises both impartiality and public credibility in the process. The absence of an independent civilian authority to oversee the inquiry violates the Protocol's requirement that investigations into extrajudicial executions or excessive use of force be conducted under civilian jurisdiction and free from hierarchical interference.

3. LACK OF TRANSPARENCY AND PARTICIPATION OF OVERSIGHT BODIES AND FAMILY MEMBERS

The Protocol also requires that investigations be transparent and open to public scrutiny, ensuring that the victims' families and independent institutions can monitor the process. This principle was also violated.

The Public Defender's Office of the State of Rio de Janeiro, which serves as a monitoring body for ADPF 635 (ADPF of the Favelas), was prevented from entering the Forensic Medical Institute (IML) to observe the examinations of the bodies and record its own technical findings. The denial of access made it impossible to produce counterevidence and external oversight of the forensic work, compromising the legitimacy of the state's conclusions. The only body authorized to monitor the process was the state Public Prosecutor's Office – the same entity that, according to public security leadership, participated in the planning of the operation. This fact alone eliminates any appearance of independence and neutrality.

At the same time, state authorities initiated a criminal investigation against residents and family members on charges of procedural fraud, reinforcing a narrative of criminalization of communities and human rights defenders. UN experts have explicitly voiced concern over this approach, warning that opening investigations against civilians in such a context could constitute retaliation



and intimidation, in direct violation of the state's duty to protect witnesses, family members, and activists cooperating with investigations.

4. FAILURES IN THE COLLECTION AND PRESERVATION OF DIGITAL EVIDENCE

The Protocol requires that all relevant evidence, including digital evidence, be preserved and analyzed. Authorities, however, acknowledged that part of the footage from the body cameras used by agents during the operation was lost due to battery depletion, as the devices had a battery life of 12 hours. There was no public record of any protocol for the storage and retrieval of the footage, nor any information on how many cameras were operational at the time of the action.

The loss of this digital evidence represents a direct violation of the duty of diligence and thoroughness in investigation, depriving the inquiry of objective elements necessary for reconstructing the facts. According to the Minnesota Protocol, any technical limitation must be documented and publicly justified, which, in this case, did not occur.

5. FAILURES IN AUTOPSIES AND VICTIM IDENTIFICATION

The Minnesota Protocol stipulates that, in cases of mass killings or lethal police operations, post-mortem examinations must follow rigorous scientific standards, including a detailed search for signs of torture, summary execution, and injuries consistent with abuse.

Despite statements that the IML was applying an “extensive inspection protocol,” reports from family members and human rights organizations indicate that some bodies had their hands or feet tied, gunshot wounds to the back of the neck, and even decapitation, raising suspicions of summary executions. In these cases, the Protocol requires that forensic examiners provide a technical analysis of the mechanism and cause of the injuries, information that, to date, has not been made public.

Furthermore, the identification of victims was largely visual, carried out by family members themselves under conditions of extreme distress (including young pregnant women), with the bodies lined up in the square. The Protocol, however, recommends that, in events involving multiple deaths, identification should be based on primary scientific methods such as DNA analysis, dental records, or fingerprints, in order to ensure accuracy and prevent errors resulting from the emotional state of families.



6. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In light of the obligations set forth by the Minnesota Protocol, the numerous failures observed in the conduct of the investigation into Operation Containment indicates non-compliance with the minimum standards of diligence, independence, and transparency. The failure to preserve the scene, the reliance on investigations conducted by the potential perpetrators themselves, the denial of access to independent bodies, and the criminalization of family members and residents constitute direct violations of Brazil's international obligations.

The gravity and scale of the event require an autonomous, civilian, and independent investigation, under federal or international supervision, with the effective participation of the Public Defender's Office, the Federal Public Prosecutor's Office, and independent forensic experts. Without such guarantees, the investigation of the 121 deaths tends to repeat the historical pattern of impunity and opacity that the Minnesota Protocol was created precisely to prevent.



Credit: Bruno Itan/Cedido a Justiça Global



VII. UN Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms

Given that Operation Containment resulted in the deaths of 117 civilians and four police officers, it must be analyzed from the perspective of the United Nations Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials (BPUFF, 1990), a normative instrument that guides the conduct of security agents in all circumstances, including those involving organized crime and armed violence. This document establishes that the use of force must always comply with the principles of legality, necessity, proportionality, precaution, and accountability, with the primary purpose of preserving human life.

The context described by the authorities of Rio de Janeiro as one of “irregular warfare” and “asymmetric warfare,” does not exempt the State from complying with these principles. The Minnesota Protocol (2016), which complements the BPUFF, reinforces that exceptional circumstances, such as internal instability or public emergency, can never justify deviations from the international norms governing the use of lethal force.

1. PRINCIPLE OF RESTRAINT AND PROPORTIONALITY (BPUFF 5(A) AND 9)

The BPUFF stipulates that force and firearms may only be used when strictly necessary and in proportion to the seriousness of the threat faced, with the intentional use of lethal force being admissible only when unavoidable to protect life. The scale of lethality of the operation (117 civilians killed, many of whom had no arrest warrants or direct connection to the judicial targets) raises serious doubts about compliance with this principle.

Reports from residents and local organizations indicate indiscriminate gunfire, including from helicopters and drones, with the use of explosives and other devices in densely populated areas. The deployment of military tactics in civilian territories, without proper isolation or prior evacuation, contravenes the duty to minimize damage and injury and preserve human lives (BPUFF 5(b)). The use of air power and highly lethal means in the urban context of favelas is incompatible with the principles of restraint and proportionality, constituting an indiscriminate risk to the civilian population.

2. PRINCIPLE OF ASSISTANCE AND MEDICAL AID (BPUFF 5(C))

Law enforcement officers have a duty to ensure immediate medical assistance to any person injured or affected by police action. In this operation,



residents reported being denied assistance, including a woman who suffered a heart attack and a pregnant woman in labor, situations in which intervention by the Public Defender's Office was necessary to guarantee emergency care.

The same logistical failures affected the officers who participated in the action: a police officer from the K-9 Operations Battalion (BAC), wounded in the leg and abdomen, waited nearly two hours before being evacuated from the confrontation area and taken to Getúlio Vargas Hospital. Although the authorities attributed the delay to operational difficulties, the BPUFF is clear in stating that the duty to provide assistance applies even in scenarios of high tactical complexity. These incidents constitute a direct violation of the principle of humanitarian assistance (BPUFF 5(c)), which is inseparable from the obligation to protect the life and physical integrity of all persons involved.

3. PRINCIPLE OF LEGALITY AND INTEGRITY OF CONDUCT (BPUFF 5)

The UN principles require that all police actions must strictly comply with the law and be guided by the need to protect fundamental rights. However, residents reported home invasions conducted without a warrant, during which agents allegedly stated, "I am the law, I am the judge, warrants my ass," according to testimonies collected by the Public Defender's Office Ombudsman.

Even if they occurred in the context of an anti-drug trafficking operation, such conduct blatantly violates the principle of legality and the constitutional right to the inviolability of the home, also provided for in the BPUFF. The absence of judicial oversight and proper documentation of searches prevents the traceability and legitimacy of police action, creating opportunities for abuse and arbitrariness.

4. PRINCIPLES OF REPORTING, REVIEW, AND ACCOUNTABILITY (BPUFF 6 AND 22)

The BPUFF establish that all incidents resulting in death, injury, or use of force must be immediately reported and subject to independent review. In the case of Operation Containment, serious flaws in the documentation, preservation, and transparency of information are observed, in clear breach of this principle.

Authorities acknowledged the partial loss of footage from the body cameras used by officers, alleging battery depletion and lack of recharging during the prolonged confrontation. This loss of crucial audiovisual material compromises the duty of accountability and effective review established under BPUFF 22. Furthermore, the initiation of a criminal investigation for "procedural



fraud” against the residents who removed the bodies from the wooded area, instead of focusing on investigating the circumstances of the deaths, reinforces the reversal of priorities: civilians affected by the use of force are criminalized, while the technical scrutiny of police conduct remains restricted and opaque.

These failures highlight the absence of an independent accountability mechanism, which is essential to guarantee public trust and prevent the recurrence of abuses.

CONSIDERATIONS

The inconsistency between the official rhetoric of “protecting the population” and the scale of the recorded lethality reveals the disconnect between the purported planning and the international parameters that regulate the legitimate use of force. The outcome of the operation, with 121 deaths, is incompatible with the principle that the use of firearms should be restricted to the minimum necessary and only when strictly unavoidable to protect lives (BPUFF 9).

The overall picture indicates that, rather than an operation carefully planned according to the principles of necessity and precaution, it was structured under a logic of militarized confrontation, at odds with the civilian function of the police forces. The lack of adequate assistance, warrantless raids, loss of evidence, and criminalization of residents reinforce the pattern of systematic violations of the UN Principles on the Use of Force, turning the State’s duty to protect into a policy of extermination and collective intimidation.

The Ombudsman of the Public Defender’s Office of the State of Rio de Janeiro, which monitored the events between October 28 and November 1, 2025, documented these violations and presented them in preliminary reports, emphasizing the discrepancy between international standards for police action and the practice adopted in the favelas of Penha and Alemão.

In summary, the case demands a thorough review of the protocols for the use of force in Brazil and reaffirms the need for civilian oversight, transparency, and effective accountability of public security institutions in the face of mass deaths caused by State actions.



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The information contained in this report is also based on direct observations made by the Justiça Global team, which was present in the Penha Complex at various moments immediately after and in the days following the massacre, as well as at the City of Police, the José Frederico Marques Public Jail, and the Forensic Medical Institute (IML).

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