

## **Transnational Repression: Trends and Policy Approaches**

### **Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission**

Testimony by Paulo Figueiredo

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Chairman McGovern, Chairman Smith, and distinguished members of the Commission:

Thank you, Chairman McGovern, for your leadership on transnational repression. While we disagree on some policies—as democracies should—I appreciate your commitment to this critical issue.

Today's authoritarian regimes have weaponized democratic institutions themselves. They cloak persecution in legal language and exploit international organizations. Brazil exemplifies this evolution—maintaining democracy's facade while dismantling its foundations.

I am an award-winning Brazilian journalist whose television program once commanded Brazil's largest cable news audience and today, despite unprecedented censorship, I still lead internet ratings with over one million views per episode.

My first encounter with transnational repression began in 2019, when Brazilian authorities decreed my preventive arrest in a highly politicized case involving President Trump. Though I was already living legally in the United States, Brazil placed me on Interpol's red notice list, triggering the cancellation of my journalist visa. ICE agents took me in handcuffs to Krome detention center for seventeen days in a case later terminated by Brazil itself. I spent over one million dollars on legal fees and endured years of immigration court battles.

In 2022, Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes—Brazil's current dictator masquerading as a judge—targeted me again for reporting inconvenient truths. He froze all my Brazilian assets, blocked my social media, canceled my passport, and condemned me to exile. When legal channels proved insufficient, he used back channels to have the U.S. FBI call me, attempting to coerce testimony. House Judiciary Committee Chair Jim Jordan questioned this unprecedented violation in a letter to FBI Director Christopher Wray on May 21, 2024—a letter never answered.

Today, Moraes publicly insults me from Brazil's highest court, calling me a "pseudo-journalist" and "fugitive" though I've lived openly in Florida for ten years. He claims there's a secret arrest warrant against me. I cannot defend myself because I have not been formally charged, and I don't even know if I've been placed on Interpol's list again.

My case is not isolated but part of a systematic campaign. Journalist Allan dos Santos spent over two years on Interpol's red notice list before his lawyer proved the Brazilian government possessed no evidence and got his name removed. When the Biden administration denied his extradition, stating his conduct wasn't criminal in the United States, leaked dialogues revealed Moraes's judicial advisors discussing the possibility of sending operatives to kidnap Allan from U.S. soil and clandestinely transport him to Brazil. His warrant remains open in Brazil, and he continues facing millions in fines for posts made from the United States.

My colleague Rodrigo Constantino, an American citizen, faces similar persecution. Even award-winning American journalist Michael Shellenberger has been targeted by Moraes. Stop for a moment to contemplate the gravity of what I'm saying: We are witnessing a foreign government agent systematically persecuting American journalists and permanent residents for journalistic content published on American soil.

But the persecution extends beyond journalists to democratically elected officials. Eduardo Bolsonaro, Brazil's most voted congressman, had a case opened against him by Moraes for denouncing Brazilian abuses to this very Congress. He lives in exile here, fearing arrest upon return.

Just last month, yet another congresswoman—Carla Zambelli, Brazil's most voted woman for Congress—had preventive arrest decreed by Moraes. She was in the United States for medical treatment but managed to reach Italy, where she holds Italian citizenship, before being placed on Interpol's list. Sadly, two days later, the State Department canceled her U.S. visa.

Another alarming case is that of Filipe Martins, former Special Advisor to President Bolsonaro. U.S. Customs and Border Protection systems falsely showed Martins had entered the United States when he was actually under surveillance in Brazil. This fabricated entry was used by Moraes to justify his six-month imprisonment without charges. CBP later corrected the false record, but only after months of legal pressure. The case, currently in U.S. federal court, raises serious questions about potential clandestine collaboration between Brazilian authorities and elements within American agencies.

Even humble citizens aren't safe. Just to give one example—Brazilian-American housekeeper Flávia Magalhães had her arrest decreed by Moraes for social media posts critical of Brazil's electoral system made on American soil.

Tech entrepreneurs like Chris Pavlovski, CEO of Rumble, and Elon Musk also fall victim to Moraes's systematic persecution.

In fact, Moraes has attempted to transform American tech companies into unwitting instruments of his repression. An unknown number of Brazilians have had their social media accounts blocked by his orders, including individuals residing on American territory. Tech giants like Meta, X, and Rumble faced threats of massive fines and executive imprisonment unless they shared data about individuals on American soil with Moraes.

Don't take my word for it: similar conduct under Moraes's threats led Rumble to take the unprecedented step of suing him in US federal court in Florida. On February 25, 2025, U.S. Federal Judge Mary Scriven ruled that Moraes's orders were unenforceable in the United States and prohibited anyone from attempting to enforce them.

Moraes's response was swift and vindictive: he branded CEO Chris Pavlovski as a criminal and banned the platform entirely in Brazil.

This weaponization of corporate fear contributed to X's temporary departure from Brazil in 2024, with Elon Musk remaining under investigation and even the unrelated company SpaceX being targeted. Faced with such retaliation, other companies like Google and Meta comply with Moraes orders despite formally recognizing their illegitimacy.

The implications for national security are staggering. Imagine if any judge from any country in the world could order American companies to provide data about individuals on American soil.

The U.S. Department of Justice sent Brazil a warning letter dated May 7, 2025, lecturing Brazilian authorities not to invade American jurisdiction.

Let me reiterate my urgent warning to this Congress last year: without decisive American action, we will have an enormous Venezuela on steroids in South America's heart. Since then, the situation has gotten significantly worse.

The United States has powerful tools like the Global Magnitsky Act for human rights violations—freedom of expression, press, and due process. I urge this commission to recommend sanctions against Moraes within 30 days.

However, these are insufficient. We need legislation specifically targeting transnational repression—a bipartisan imperative.

This commission should also recommend that the government should also stop considering Interpol red notices for visas, pressure Interpol to adopt rigorous criteria for politically motivated cases, and create asylum exceptions for transnational repression victims.

When foreign courts override the First Amendment, when U.S. citizens are silenced for American speech, when our systems are manipulated against dissidents—we face an assault on American sovereignty and constitutional democracy itself.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter. I welcome your questions.