

## **Solidarity with Repórter Brasil: Investigational NGO becomes a target for cyberattacks and threats against employees**

12.02.2021

Unidentified individuals have attacked the website of Repórter Brasil and demanded the non-governmental organization to delete any investigative research and report on violations to human and labour rights within the Brazilian economy. Shortly thereafter, employees of the organization were threatened by means of an e-mail. With this letter, we reject the attacks against Repórter Brasil and express our solidarity with all employees! For more than 20 years now, this journalism organization has been doing its part to denounce inequalities and it has been helping to uncover human and labour rights abuses in the Brazilian economy which maintains wide supply relations to other global regions, such as Europe.

### **Chronology of the attack on the website and against employees of Repórter Brasil:**

For several days in January, Repórter Brasil had been the target of frequent cyberattacks that eventually resulted in a crash of the website (reporterbrasil.org.br) as well as a temporary unavailability to its users. The attackers threatened to continually commit their deeds unless specific research and reports would be erased from the website. In addition to that, the team of the organization was threatened by means of an e-mail.

After the attacks had initially brought down the website for several hours on 6<sup>th</sup> January, Repórter Brasil received an anonymous e-mail which said: "As you may have already noticed, there had been some technical issues during the past days. To avoid experiencing the same issues again, you are prompted to delete the research contained in the folders of 2003, 2004 und 2005".

On 7<sup>th</sup> January, there was an attempted burglary at the São Paulo site of the organization. Thanks to the presence of local neighbours, the unknown individuals could be successfully prevented from infiltrating the premises. Since that moment, Repórter Brasil started to strengthen its security measures.

On 8<sup>th</sup> January, the cybercriminals sent another e-mail, this time issuing an ultimatum: "We will wait until 11<sup>th</sup> January to see whether or not you will meet our demands". The attacks on the website resumed on 11<sup>th</sup> January.

Repórter Brasil did not succumb to this menace: according to its own information, the organization still refuses to give in to the demand of self-censorship. Attacks continued for more than a week. The website was temporarily unavailable for several hours on each single day. The online security staff managed to eliminate the risks, but website access remained unstable due to attackers frequently changing their patterns.

On 13<sup>th</sup> January, the attackers dispatched an e-mail in which they threatened the team of the organization: "Warning: If you do not fulfil our demands within 48 hours, the consequences will not only be the crash of your website, but also the impairment to all employees working with your company". This resulted in another strengthening of the non-governmental organization's security measures. Attorneys-at-law assisted in reporting these incidents to the São Paulo police department. Repórter Brasil contacted the competent authorities as well as the Federal Prosecution Service (MPF) vigilantly observing the progress of their efforts. Police forces inspected the premises of Repórter Brasil and opened an investigation.

Cyberattacks and attempts of intimidating co-workers of the research organization constitute attacks on the rights to freedom of speech and press. They are classified as criminal offences of harassment, as determined in Article 146 of the Brazilian Criminal Code. Attacks on Repórter Brasil are not unprecedented: according to the organization's own statement, it is permanently being harassed and threatened by people who are unsatisfied with its work and who demand the erasure of its reports. It is left unclear who is behind these attacks. The issue will be handled by diligent investigation of the responsible authorities. After disclosing the subject matter to the public, the organization received support by the Brazilian Journalists Association, the Brazilian Press Association, the Committee to Protect Journalists, Reporters Without Borders and further organizations and media representatives.

### **Solidarity with Repórter Brasil!**

This attack is a warning signal to all non-governmental organizations and journalists who work investigatively to uncover and denounce labour and human rights abuses by companies! It proves that any information criticizing the economy is more and more frequently censored by cyberattacks and digital threats. Such attacks with the aim to delete any information containing criticism of companies pose severe threats to the freedom of speech and press of civil society organizations. We demand a complete clarification of the case and full protection to all employees of Repórter Brasil by the state and its government bodies!

Read here the international warning by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) [here](#).

### **Background:**

Repórter Brasil is a non-profit organization founded by journalists, social scientists and educators for the purpose of raising public awareness about human and labour rights abuses in Brazil. Repórter Brasil is one of the initiators of the Roundtable against Slave Labour in Brazil publishing investigative research and case studies on a regular basis. This journalism organization celebrates its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary in the year of 2021. Repórter Brasil's essential reporting on environmental crimes and human rights abuses is internationally renowned and won several awards.

### **Author**



### **Signatories**



