

Brazilian police say remains of journalist Dom Phillips identified

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Veteran foreign correspondent Dom Phillips was last seen alive alongside Brazilian Indigenous expert Bruno Pereira on June 5 in a remote part of Brazil's Amazon region [File: Joao Laet/AFP]

Brasilia, June 18 (RHC)-- Federal police in Brazil say they have identified the remains of British journalist Dom Phillips, who disappeared alongside Brazilian Indigenous expert Bruno Pereira in a remote area of the country's Amazon rainforest in early June.

Brazilian authorities earlier this week discovered human remains after a suspect confessed to killing Phillips and Pereira, and took investigators to where the bodies were buried.

Phillips was identified through forensic analysis of the unearthed remains, Brazil's federal police agency said in a statement on Friday. The agency said it was still working on "complete identification" of the remains, which may include those of Pereira. Work was under way to determine the cause of death, the police also said.

"The remains of Dom Phillips were part of the material collected at the place indicated by Amarildo da Costa Oliveira," they said, referring to the main suspect in the case.

Earlier in the day, federal police said their investigation into the two men's killings so far has suggested that those responsible acted without the involvement of a criminal organisation.

They said they were still searching with the help of the local Indigenous group UNIVAJA for the boat Phillips and Pereira were travelling in when they were last seen alive on June 5 in the Javari Valley area, which borders Peru and Colombia.

They added that their preliminary investigation suggested the crime involved more individuals beyond the suspect who confessed to the murders and that additional people could be arrested. "The investigations also point out that the killers acted alone, with no heads or criminal organisation behind the crime," police said.

But UNIVAJA challenged such investigations, saying it had informed the federal police numerous times since the second half of 2021 that there was an organised crime group operating in the Javari Valley.

Phillips was on a reporting trip in the Javari Valley with Pereira, considered to be one of Brazil's most knowledgeable experts on isolated and uncontacted tribes, when the two men disappeared.

The area is home to the world's largest number of uncontacted Indigenous people, threatened by illegal miners, loggers, hunters and, increasingly, coca-growing groups that produce the raw material for cocaine.

The discovery of the remains on Wednesday ended a grim 10-day search for Phillips and Pereira. Their disappearance had sparked widespread global concern and calls for Brazil's far-right President Jair Bolsonaro to do more to help search groups find them.

Bolsonaro was slammed for what many called a slow and lacklustre response, and for remarks he made saying Phillips and Pereira "were on an adventure that is not recommended."

He also suggested that Phillips, a freelance journalist who regularly contributed to The Guardian, had made enemies by writing about environmental issues.

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