

Brazil judge denies request to overturn WhatsApp suspension

May 3 2016



A taxi driver checks to see if his WhatsApp is working in Sao Paulo, Brazil, Monday, May 2, 2016. A Brazilian judge investigating a drug ring has ordered cell phone operators to block the messaging app WhatsApp for 72 hours. (AP Photo/Andre Penner)

A judge on Tuesday refused to overturn a judicial order suspending service by the messaging service WhatsApp in Brazil for 72 hours.

The suspension went into effect Monday shortly after it was ordered by

Judge Marcel Maia Montalvao, in the northeastern state of Sergipe. Judge Cezario Siqueira Neto on Tuesday morning refused to reverse that decision.

A court official in Sergipe said the suspension was ordered because WhatsApp has repeatedly failed to turn over information about its users for an investigation into drug trafficking and organized crime.

WhatsApp officials have estimated that the service is used by 100 million Brazilians.

"Yet again millions of innocent Brazilians are being punished because a court wants WhatsApp to turn over information we repeatedly said we don't have," the messaging service's CEO and co-founder Jan Koum said on his Facebook page. "We encrypt messages end-to-end on WhatsApp to keep people's information safe and secure, we also don't keep your chat history on our servers."

"We have no intention of compromising the security of our billion users around the world," he added.

The suspension is the latest chapter in a dispute between Brazilian law enforcement and Facebook, which bought WhatsApp in 2014.

In March, Facebook's most senior representative in Latin America was detained in Sao Paulo and held overnight.

At the time, a spokeswoman for federal police in Sergipe, Monica Horta, said investigators had requested content from a WhatsApp messaging group as well as other data, including geolocation. Investigators first contacted WhatsApp several months earlier but hadn't received a response, Horta said.

Brazilian authorities also clashed with Facebook in December, when a judicial order forced telecoms to block WhatsApp for about 12 hours over its alleged refusal to cooperate with a police inquiry.

Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg at the time said he was "stunned" by the "extreme decision."

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