

# Brazil judge, Musk standoff intensifies as Starlink assets frozen

August 30 2024

---



Brazil Supreme Court judge Alexandre de Moraes ordered Elon Musk to name a new legal representative in the country or face X being shut down there.

A standoff between a Brazilian Supreme Court judge and Elon Musk intensified Thursday as the billionaire's Starlink company said its assets

had been frozen in the country amid a feud over the fate of his social media platform X.

The episode began Wednesday when Brazilian Supreme Court Judge Alexandre de Moraes threatened to suspend X, formerly known as Twitter, unless Musk named a new legal representative for the company in Brazil within 24 hours.

Then on Thursday, Musk's satellite internet operator Starlink said it had received an order from Moraes that "freezes Starlink's finances and prevents Starlink from conducting financial transactions" in the country.

Starlink, which operates in Brazil, particularly in the Amazon, alleged that the order "is based on an unfounded determination that Starlink should be responsible for the fines levied—unconstitutionally—against X."

The company said on X that it intended "to address the matter legally."

Moraes, who also presides over Brazil's Superior Electoral Tribunal, has spearheaded a battle against disinformation in South America's largest nation, clashing with Musk along the way.

Several of the X accounts he ordered suspended belonged to supporters of Brazil's former far-right president Jair Bolsonaro, who tried to discredit the voting system in the 2022 election, which he lost.

Moraes's Wednesday decision escalated the months-long feud.

Already in April, Moraes had ordered an investigation of Musk, accusing him of reactivating some of the banned accounts.

Musk and other critics accuse Moraes of stifling free speech.

## 'Censorship orders'

In the order made public Wednesday, Moraes told Musk "to appoint the company's new legal representative in Brazil within 24 hours."

"In the event of non-compliance with the order, the decision provides for the suspension of the social network's activities in Brazil," it said.

Following the order, the hashtag "O Twitter morreu" ("Twitter is dead") went viral in Brazil, and leftist President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva posted a message on the platform with the addresses of his other social media accounts.

Musk responded to the order by accusing Moraes of having "repeatedly broken the laws he has sworn to uphold."

He also posted a sarcastic message and doctored photo depicting Moraes as "Voldemort and a Sith Lord," an allusion to the villains of the Harry Potter and Star Wars sagas.

Musk shut X's business operations in Brazil earlier this month, claiming Moraes had threatened the company's previous legal representative with arrest to force compliance with "censorship orders."

Brazilian users, meanwhile, have continued to be able to access the social media site.

Musk is also the subject of a separate judicial investigation into an alleged scheme where public money was used to orchestrate disinformation campaigns in favor of Bolsonaro and those close to him.

The proliferation and amplification of misinformation and conspiracy theories on social media has sparked debate over the need for content

moderation and to strike a balance between calling out falsehoods and veering towards censorship or curbing free speech.

That debate has intensified with France's recent arrest of Telegram chief Pavel Durov, who faces a possible trial related to illegal content on his messaging app.

Musk, who has reduced content moderation on X since taking over the former Twitter in 2022, has voiced support for Durov, posting comments under the hashtag #FreePavel.

After the charges, Musk posted a meme on X of a surveillance camera attached to buildings inscribed with France's motto, "liberty, equality, fraternity."

© 2024 AFP

Citation: Brazil judge, Musk standoff intensifies as Starlink assets frozen (2024, August 30) retrieved 31 August 2024 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2024-08-brazil-musk-standoff-starlink-assets.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.