

da " www.news.com.au ", From correspondents in Rio De Janeiro, Brazil, Agence France-Presse
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Two Brazilian policemen were killed when their helicopter came under fire from a gang in a slum below and burst into flames after making an emergency landing.

The pilot struggled to put the helicopter down safely after being shot in the leg by suspected drug traffickers while flying over a Rio slum, a public security official said.

The aircraft exploded shortly after touching down, leaving two officers stuck inside the burning wreckage.

Two others, including the pilot, managed to escape, said Major Oderlei Santos.

The incident happened at the Morro dos Macacos favela, where police responded to gunfire between rival drug gangs nearby shortly after dawn.

After the crash, a fresh gunbattle broke out as more than 100 policemen backed by armoured vehicles and special forces tried to regain control of the area.

After the helicopter crashed a new gunbattle erupted between gangs and more than a hundred policemen, backed by Special Police Operations Battalion (BOPE) troops and an armoured vehicle.

"I have never heard so many gunshots in my life," a 15-year-old girl who lives in Morro dos Macacos told the G1 website of the Globo media network.

During exchanges of fire with police throughout the day, eight gang members lost their lives and six others were wounded, including two civilians, a policeman and three gang members, a Public Security Secretariat official said.

Nine buses were also set on fire in other neighbourhoods close to "Morro dos Macacos" favela, in retaliation for a police operation aimed at controlling heavy gun battles between rival drug gangs in the area.

Bus driver Fabio Nascimento said 15 masked men armed with guns and pistols had ordered him to step out of his vehicle and evacuate passengers, declaring: "Get out, get out, we are going to light it on fire!"

Urban violence is widespread in Rio, where nearly one third of the two-million-strong population live in slums.

The incident comes just weeks after the city was awarded the 2016 summer Olympics.

Rio's win to host the 2016 Olympic Games, the first ever to be held in South America, is a serious challenge for the city, hit by endemic urban violence. Some 6000 people were murdered here in 2008 alone.