

Brazil to Propose Abortion Bill

Contributed by Fabiana Vezzali
Saturday, 29 January 2005

Brazil's Minister of the Special Secretariat of Government Policies for Women, Nilcea Freire, gave the initial kickoff to public debate over the legalization of abortion in Brazil.

Freire participated, January 27, in the launching of a campaign organized by feminist movements present at the V World Social Forum.

The campaign proposes that Brazilian laws be revised to decriminalize the practice of abortion.

Brazil's Constitution only allows pregnancy to be interrupted under two circumstances: rape or fatal risk to the mother's life.

To ensure a broad discussion of this issue, the Minister asked for the full participation of society.

She pointed out that this will be the first time the question is discussed since the announcement of the National Plan of Policies for Women, and she acknowledged that the debate will be "difficult."

"Governments have limits, but I feel very comfortable being part of this government. From the position I occupy, I can expand the limits of this discussion."

According to Minister Matilde Ribeiro, of the Special Secretariat for the Promotion of Racial Equality, the appeal for more social involvement is perfectly justifiable.

Defining herself as a militant member of the feminist movement, she argued that the activities under her jurisdiction and that of Minister Freire should be combined to guarantee social rights as a form of combatting poverty and inequality.

"We need to turn around this attitude that a large portion of Brazilian society doesn't deserve the right to make decisions about their own lives."

There are no official statistics in Brazil on the number of abortions that occur. Nevertheless, data from the Ministry of Health indicate that around 250 thousand women are hospitalized each year by the Federal Health System (SUS) as a result of abortions.

In most of these instances the women who are victims of complications arising from abortions are black and poor.

"The State should be secular, but it can't remain neutral, nor can it be blind," Ribeiro contends.

Beginning in February, the government will create a commission made up of members of the Executive, the legislature, and civil society.

The group is expected to propose a new law on abortion, after holding public hearings with the population.

Translation: David Silberstein
Agência Brasil