

In Brazil, a Special Secretariat to End Discrimination

Contributed by Luthianna Hollenbach
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The Special Secretariat of Policies for the Promotion of Racial Equality (Sepir) celebrated its second anniversary this Monday, March 21. For Minister Matilde Ribeiro, however, in spite of all the intensive work by the current government regarding this matter, four years are a very short period of time in history, when compared to five centuries of racial discrimination in Brazil.

According to the Minister, the current idea that there is no racism in Brazil is not true.

"Here in Brazil we were made to believe, for a long time, that we live in a racial democracy and that, therefore, there are no differences between Afro-descendants, Caucasians, and native Brazilians. This (is what is said) in books and theses. Daily practices prove differently," she stresses.

Ribeiro says that the Ministry is working relentlessly for racial equality, but that there is still a lot to be done.

"There is a favorable movement toward overcoming racism, but this historical heritage, this exclusion stain, will take some time to be totally banned from our history," she says.

In the Minister's opinion, despite all contrasts, Brazil has advanced in the battle against racism. She emphasizes the importance of partnerships when developing this type of work.

"Our ancestors' struggles were not in vain. Today, we have government programs, at federal, state and municipal levels. We count on the hard work of several NGOs. Brazilian society is more aware of the need to overcome racism. Government policies are making progress," adds Ribeiro.

March 21st was proclaimed the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination by the United Nations, to remember the Sharpeville massacre, in South Africa.

On that date, in 1960, police killed 69 people at a peaceful demonstration against apartheid, a social and political policy of racial segregation and discrimination enforced by the South-African white government from 1948 through 1990, when it began to be dismantled.

Translation: Andréa Alves
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