

Every 15 Seconds a Brazilian Woman Suffers Violence

Contributed by Joanne Blaney
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Approximately 40,000 Brazilian women from all over the country gathered in São Paulo on March 8 to Commemorate International Women's Day. The principal themes of the march were equality, justice, peace and solidarity, and freedom.

Women from more than 60 different urban and rural organizations participated in the march as well as members of the Worldwide March of Women from Burkina Faso and Quebec.

The mobilization included women from very different realities and situations. Rural landless workers, students, farmers, physically-challenged women in wheelchairs, factory workers, retired women, feminists, indigenous and Afro-Brazilian women, teachers, and housekeepers walked side by side in solidarity and unity.

Participants also included men, children, retired folks, human rights organizations, church and social movements, and entities that combat racism and violence.

A sea of vibrant colors and a wave of music and drums took over Avenida Paulista, the heart of the banking industry in São Paulo. The march was organized in four sections each with its own theme and vibrant colors.

The themes were:

* Equality (orange) - agrarian reform, decent minimum salary, food security.

* Justice (green) - end to racial discrimination, right to housing and urban reform, justice for persons with special physical or mental needs.

* Freedom (lilac) - health care for women, reproductive rights, struggle against the merchandising of women's bodies and violence against women.

* Peace and Solidarity (red) - struggle against war, imperialism, the feminization of poverty, and the Free Trade Accord of the Americas; working toward demilitarization.

The grim reality of most Brazilian women is disheartening. Brazil's long history of inequality between men and women reveals itself in discrimination and violence against women.

Thirteen and a half million women, many of whom are rural or domestic workers as well as heads of their family, earn one minimum salary (about US\$ 100) per month.

Women comprise 51% of the Brazilian population and 43% of women work outside the home. However, the salary for women is 26% less than a man for the same work. (Diesse analysis, 2003).

A study by the Perseu Abramo Foundation (2003) indicates that Afro-Brazilian women earn on average 50% of the income of white women and about 35% of the income of white men.

There continues to be widespread discrimination against indigenous and lesbian women. Politically, women make up only 7% of senators and 6% of mayors in the country.

Violence against women continues to be a major problem. According to the Abramo Foundation, every 15 seconds a woman suffers a violent aggression in Brazil, most of which occurs in the home. Seventy percent of the aggressors in these cases are husbands, ex-husbands or boyfriends of the victims.

Lack of health care for women is shown in the high incidence of breast cancer and deaths of women at child-birth. This global march called for government investment in day care centers, quality schools, collective laundries, and health care.

A decent and just minimum salary would help in the long run to diminish social inequality and the scandalous disparity in income that exists in Brazil. Success stories of women uniting and changing oppressive structures were met with cheers at the march.

The presence of so many young women gave vibrancy and hope that "another world is possible". According to Rejane Andrade, a 38 year-old domestic worker and mother of 4 children,

"For the first time in my life, I feel like a real citizen with hope that together we can change our society and make life better for other women."

The conclusion of the march was the beginning of the world tour for the Women's Global Charter for Humanity, which was adopted by international women's groups in Kigali, Rwanda in December 2004.

The text of the charter was written by women throughout the world. This world tour for the charter for equal rights began in São Paulo on March 8, 2005 and will end in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso (one of the poorest countries in Africa) in October after passing through 50 countries in-between.

The Charter includes the themes of the March 8 global march with special emphasis on food security, agrarian reform, human rights, and demilitarization. The Charter will be signed by women representatives in each country.

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