

ILO Praises the Way Brazil Is Dealing with Slave Labor

Contributed by Juliana Andrade
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The "Global Alliance Against Slave Labor" report affirms that measures taken by the Brazilian government, such as repression and the publication of black lists, serve as examples for the campaign against slave labor. The document was released yesterday by the International Labor Organization (ILO).

In the area of repression, the report points to the increase in the number of slave workers who were liberated. In 1995, when the Ministry of Labor created mobile groups, 84 workers were rescued. In 2003 the total was 4,932.

The data for 2004 are not included in the report, but, according to the coordinator of the ILO's Program to Combat Slave Labor, Patrícia Audi, 2,887 people were liberated last year.

"In 2003 and 2004, more Brazilians subjected to these conditions were rescued than in all previous years combined. This demonstrates the State's effective interest in resolving these issues."

The Brazilian government estimates that there are 25 thousand people living in conditions of slave labor in the country.

Another advance mentioned in the report is the publication of the so-called black list, with the names of companies and employers who exploit slave labor.

The list already contains the names of 166 individuals and legal entities, who are prohibited from obtaining government loans.

In the assessment of the ILO, Brazil can also be considered an example of how to punish exploiters of slave labor.

"This also appears in the report, but it is a very recent process, which began around three years ago," Audi observes.

According to her, civil moral damage suits have made the activity unprofitable.

"There have been fines of up to US\$ 527 thousand (1.3 million reais)."

As for legislation, the report points to the progress of the Constitutional Amendment Proposal (PEC) that determines the expropriation of land on which the practice of slave labor has been verified.

The bill has already been approved by the Senate and is awaiting the second round of voting in the Chamber of Deputies.

Another advance mentioned in the report is the agreement signed by the country's major steel manufacturers, pledging not to buy charcoal from industries that use slave labor.

Audi also recalled that Brazil was one of the first countries to acknowledge the existence of slave labor, in the presence of the ILO in 1995 and at a United Nations (UN) conference in March, 2004.

As a result, she said, the ILO entered into a US\$ 1.7 million technical cooperation project with the Brazilian government in April, 2002.

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