

Lula Calls Brazil's Dental Condition Shocking

Contributed by Maurício Cardoso
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Brazil's President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, speaking to the nation on his fortnightly radio program, "Breakfast with the President," said that his administration is taking the problem of buccal health seriously.

Lula said he never understood why dental treatment and buccal health were not a matter of public health policy in Brazil.

Lula recalled his activities as a union leader and the struggle to get dental care. He said the problem was about to be resolved finally.

"I was the head of the São Bernardo autoworkers union for a long time and fought with management a lot. For example, automakers have contracts with health management plans that do not include dental treatment. I always thought it was absurd not to include buccal care as part of public health," said the President.

Surveys by the Ministry of Health show that only 55% of Brazilian youths have all their teeth and that three out of four older people have no teeth at all.

To reverse that "shocking" situation, Lula declared that by the end of 2006, the number of buccal health teams in the field around the country working on prevention, treatment and education as part of the Brazil Smile Program will just about double from the present 8,800 to 16,000 and that 400 buccal care centers will be opened.

The President revealed that traveling around the country he was able to see how bad is the dental situation among Brazilians in the big and smaller cities:

"You can see youngsters who are 17, 18, 19 years old and who have no teeth in their mouth. And there is nothing worse than a girl who is 18, 19 and who can't smile anymore, who can't talk freely with her boyfriend or friends, who cannot laugh. No one without teeth will want to smile, he will be ashamed."

He added that the program will put a halt to the electoral use of dental treatment by politicians. Nowadays, one way for a politician to get votes is to promise dental treatment to those who vote for him/her.

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