

# Brazilian Bishops Ready to Unleash All-Out Campaign Against Abortion Legalization

Contributed by Alessandra Bastos  
Friday, 11 November 2005

The Brazilian National Bishops Conference (CNBB) has decided to wage a campaign against Bill 1135/91, now before the Brazilian Congress, which proposes to legalize abortion.

The bill was drafted by a commission including members of the executive, lawmakers, and representatives of civil society. The bishops are preparing a letter to be delivered to President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and the members of Congress.

"We feel a solemn duty to manifest a commitment to life, a gift of God, and express total disagreement with bills that seek to decriminalize abortion," the text states.

The 1940 Penal Code, which is still in effect, considers abortion a crime under any hypothesis, except when the life of the expectant mother is at stake, or the pregnancy is the result of rape.

Only four countries in Latin America - Chile, Colombia, El Salvador, and Honduras - prohibit voluntary abortion under any circumstance. In Cuba and Puerto Rico, on the other hand, the practice is not subject to any restrictions.

The CNBB will orient the faithful to oppose the bill. "The bishops will pass the message along to the clergy and, through them, to the faithful. It is a process of permanent education," said the vice president of the CNBB, Don Antônio Celso de Queirós.

According to the US non-governmental organization, the Center for Reproductive Rights, more than four million women die annually in Latin America as a consequence of complications caused by abortions. This represents 13% of maternal mortality in the region.

A study released in September by the Brazilian non-governmental organization, Citizen's Advocacy for Human Rights, indicates that the majority of women who suffer from complications or die in Brazil as a result of botched abortions are poor, black, and have little schooling.

For the Catholic Church, the one acceptable birth control method is education. The vice president of the CNBB said that "this is not a matter of the rights of women nor of the poor; there are many upper class people who have abortions."

A United Nations (UN) report issued last month contends that abortions performed in inadequate settings and complications associated with giving birth are the main cause of death around the world among young women between the ages of 15 and 19.

In the aftermath of the referendum on firearms, 300 referenda and plebiscite proposals are currently circulating in the National Congress. One of the themes is the legalization of abortion.

Don Geraldo Majella the president of the CNBB, says that the church does not concur with a referendum to consult the population on this issue. "Secondary rights may be placed in a referendum, not fundamental rights."

For Don Antônio Queirós, both the church and society are obliged to provide support to pregnant women. When asked about the expulsion of a pregnant girl from a youth group in the Mary Immaculate Church, in the satellite city of Guará II, in Brasília, on the grounds that she was not a good example for the other adolescents, Don Antônio replied that he "would expel this priest from the ministry, because he didn't understand anything. Over these people looms a grave risk of being condemned by God."

Agência Brasil