

Pro-Choice Brazilian at UN Committee Incenses Pro-Lifers

Contributed by John-Henry Westen
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Silvia Pimentel, has distinguished herself as one of the leading promoters of abortion on the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Elected to sit on the committee in January 2005 and currently serving as Vice Chair, Pimentel is one of the 23 experts on the UN body, which monitors compliance with the UN convention of the same name.

Several pro-life groups, which monitor UN proceedings expressed their frustrations with the abortion push coming from the CEDAW committee. Jeanne Head, the UN representative for the National Right to Life Committee said, "Basically the CEDAW has been misinterpreting the convention by promoting the change of abortion laws in country after country."

Thomas Jacobson, the UN representative for Focus on the Family, commented, "The CEDAW committee pressures countries on abortion especially countries where it is still illegal or highly restricted."

Jacobson explained that "There is no right to abortion or reproductive health services in the CEDAW covenant" and thus countries which have signed on to the treaty are not bound to permit abortion in order to comply with it.

Sam Singson, the UN lobbyist for Campaign Life Coalition agreed with her colleagues saying, "Unfortunately abortion pushing seems to have become normal operating procedure in the CEDAW committee."

While it may not be surprising that a CEDAW committee member encourages countries to permit abortion, even though abortion does not fall within the UN committee's mandate, the fact that Pimentel is a Professor of Philosophy of Law at the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo is raising eyebrows.

A search on the Catholic university's website (<http://www.pucsp.br/>) reveals over 70 entries boasting of their celebrated professor.

Pimentel, a long-standing feminist activist and Brazilian jurist, is known in her own country as an abortion advocate. She, at least until her UN duties commenced, coordinated the Brazilian section of the Committee of Latin America and the Caribbean for the Defense of Women's Rights (CLADEM), an openly pro-abortion group.

Pimentel's activities in promoting abortion in her homeland as coordinator for CLADEM were outlined in the group's website which is no longer available online. The website boasted of the group's activities in 2004 which included the following excerpt:

"CLADEM accepted being co-sponsor of the demonstration in Washington (organized by the Feminist Majority, NARAL Pro-Choice America, National Organization for Women, Planned Parenthood, National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health and the Black Women's Health Imperative) which objective is to support abortion and reproductive freedom."

In the most recent round of CEDAW committee meetings which ended last week, the UN body took up compliance reports and made recommendations on eight countries. During the meetings concerning Togo and Thailand, Pimentel promoted abortion.

A UN press release on the meeting with the Togolese representatives records this intervention from Pimentel:

"Ms. Pimentel, expert from Brazil, said that risks associated with unwanted pregnancies, such as unsafe abortions, were factors that aggravated maternal mortality, and asked whether the 2002-2006 national health development plans had led to a decrease in the rate of maternal mortality caused by abortions.

"She noted that only therapeutic abortions are allowed by the Togo Government, and asked whether Parliament would consider extending the reasons for justifying the interruption of pregnancy besides therapeutic ones."

Similarly, the UN press release on the committee's recommendations to the Thai delegation records the intervention from Pimentel: "Ms. Pimentel, expert from Brazil, asked if the country had policies in place to raise awareness on common responsibilities of men and women in the area of reproductive health.

"According to the report, the use of contraceptives had reached about 8 per cent in Thailand, but women still bore primary responsibility for contraception. Unplanned pregnancies often resulted in illegal abortions. She wanted to receive

more detailed information on measures taken by the Government to diminish risks to women's health and to review existing legislation to protect women's reproductive rights."

From the outset in her new position at CEDAW, Pimentel advocated abortion. In January 2005, the committee urged Paraguay to legalize abortion. A UN release records Pimentel as saying, "Complying with the Convention meant the Government must address maternal mortality and clandestine abortions. Did the Government have concrete strategies to comply with the Committee's previous recommendations?"

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