

# Handicapped Get a Place Under the Sun in Brazil

Contributed by Newsroom  
Wednesday, 03 November 2004

Representatives of 21 Iberian-American countries will meet in Rio de Janeiro between November 7 and 10 at the second Riadis to discuss the inclusion of handicapped people in society.

Riadis is Conference of the Iberian-American Network of NGO's on the Inclusion of the Handicapped and Their Families (Conferência da Rede Ibero-Americana de Organizações Não Governamentais de Pessoas com Deficiência e Seus Familiares)

It is expected that 150 people will attend the event which aims to get civil society involved in policy-making decisions. It is sponsored by the Brazilian Special Secretariat of Human Rights, with assistance from the government of Spain and the city of Rio.

Brazil was selected to host the event because of the country's strong pro-action policies in favor of human rights, especially the inclusion of the handicapped.

The Riadis is an NGO which was created in Caracas in 2002 and approved by the UN General Assembly.

The 21 members of Riadis are: Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Colombia, Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, El Salvador, Ecuador, Spain, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Panama, Peru, Portugal, Dominican Republic, Uruguay and Venezuela.

Brazil was recently classified by the UN as one of the five most active countries in this area in the Americas together with Costa Rica, Jamaica, the United States, and Canada.

This assessment was made by a group of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) associated with the International Disability Rights Monitoring (IDRM), which accompanies the quality of life and the treatment given by countries to people with disabilities.

The document was presented at the end of August in New York at a meeting of the Ad Hoc Committee, which is working on a proposal for a new United Nations (UN) convention. The study covered 24 countries.

"The report was prepared by a group of non-governmental organizations that accompanies the quality of life and the treatment given by countries to people with disabilities," explained Izabel Maior, from the National Coordinating Board for the Integration of the Disabled, part of the Brazilian government's Special Secretariat for Human Rights (SEDH).

The document gives Brazil a good rating according to six criteria: legal protection, education and job opportunities, mobility, health and housing services, communications facilities, and support for international treaties.

For Maior, even though the report places Brazil in the legislative vanguard, it is necessary to perfect and expand measures that affect people's daily lives.

## Still a Long Way

The President of the National Council for the Rights of the Disabled (Conade), Adilson Ventura, declared that, despite the positive results, Brazil has no reason to rejoice.

"Quite the opposite, we have many flaws and many needs. We are merely a little better off than the others, and in this we can see how poorly off they are, how bad the situation must be for disabled people in other countries," he pointed out.

For Maior, disabled individuals whose socio-economic circumstances are more favorable are already able to live with quality in Brazil.

She recalls, however, that this is not the case in all parts of the country and for all social classes.

"In Brazil, 40% of the population lives below the poverty line, and it is precisely in this group that the majority of people with disabilities is concentrated," she said.

She also affirmed that there is a distance separating people with disabilities from the population in general in terms of access to goods and services.

"People with disabilities don't attend school to a greater extent than those who are not disabled, they are present in the labor force to a lesser degree, and their salaries are lower," she added.

Maior informed that the process of regulating the laws that guarantee access to people with disabilities is being completed. These laws cover various facets, from access to public buildings to rules for civil aviation.

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