

World Should Ban Goods Made in Brazil by Slave Labor

Contributed by Cecilia Jorge
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The international market needs to adopt an instrument of selective trade restrictions on Brazilian products as a way to combat the use of slave labor.

This measure is defended by the Brazilian political scientist, Leonardo Sakamoto, who is a member of the National Commission for the Eradication of slave Labor in Brazil (CONATRAE).

At the end of last month, he presented this proposal to the German government and entrepreneurs. Sakamoto was invited to expatiate on this theme before a parliamentary commission in Berlin. It was there that he called for a selective trade ban.

"The same way the whole world checks sources to see whether a product is contaminated by hoof and mouth disease, the idea is for them to check on the use of slave labor, too," Sakamoto explained in an interview.

The political scientist recommended that foreign businessmen who buy raw materials from Brazil first check the list of farms and ranches where workers subjected to slave working conditions have been found. This is the so-called black list, available on the Ministry of Labor's website.

According to Sakamoto, for purchasers of manufactured items, the guideline is to demand that, on their invoices, their suppliers provide information on the sources of their raw materials. This will make it possible to determine whether a product originated on a farm or ranch where slave labor is employed.

A study conducted in 2004 by the non-governmental organization, Brazil Reporter, at the request of the Special Secretariat of Human Rights, traced the destination of products from farms and ranches on the blacklist and discovered that part of this production was destined for export.

"We identified over 200 Brazilian and transnational companies that made use of slave labor or did business with companies that made use of slave labor," Sakamoto affirmed.

The survey found slave labor present in cattle-ranching (beef and viscera), soybeans (beans, oil, and feed), sugarcane (fuel alcohol and sugarcane liquor), coffee, cotton, black pepper, and charcoal for steel-making.

Even though they were not part of the study, other supply chains, such as tomatoes, fruits, and wood, also evidence the problem. Since the study was based only on the blacklist, these areas were omitted.

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