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## Group Demands Transparency from Brazil When Granting Radio and TV Licenses

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A coalition of civil society organizations and social movements, including London-based human right organization Article 19, launched a campaign demanding transparency and participation in the attribution of public licenses for the exploitation of broadcasting services in Brazil.

"The basic information Brazilians can find in relation to public services is simply not available when it comes to broadcasting services. The government must put an end to this situation.

"Transparency is urgently needed to guarantee that Brazilians can take part in the construction of a broadcasting service that is truly plural and diverse and which respects people's freedom of expression," said Agnès Callamard, Executive Director of Article 19.

According to the 1988 Brazilian Constitution, broadcasting services are public services to be performed directly by the State or via the attribution of licenses for the exploitation of the airwaves. Licenses are granted for ten years for radio and fifteen years for television.

The Constitution and other legislation clearly stipulate that entities being granted this right are to comply with contractual and legal obligations in order to have their licenses renewed. The Ministry of Communications is responsible for assessing compliance and preparing a written evaluation which is then presented to the President of the Republic who ratifies the renewal.

For some time, however, critics say, it has been extremely difficult for civil society organizations and the general public to follow and monitor the development of renewal procedures.

The relevant legislation is extremely confusing, information provided by the Ministry is incomplete and, even upon request, information on the exploitation of a public service is considered restricted to "the interested parties" by civil servants in the Ministry.

The public is unaware of how broadcasters are evaluated by the Ministry and are prevented from participating in discussions on the compliance with legal obligations.

In order to get access to this information, Article 19 and three Brazilian organizations (Intervezes - Coletivo Brasil de Comunicação Social, the Central Única dos Trabalhadores and the União Nacional dos Estudantes) presented an information request to the Ministry of Communications.

These and other organizations also held a public demonstration on Paulista Avenue to launch a campaign for transparency in the attribution of broadcasting licenses.

Article 19 is an independent human rights organization that works globally to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.