
Brazil Holds First Conference on Brazilian Diaspora

Contributed by Marina Sarruf
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The Brazilian Foreign Office has held earlier this month (July 17 and 18) at Itamaraty Palace, in Rio de Janeiro, the 1st Conference on Brazilian Communities Abroad. The objective of the event was to expand the debate on Brazilian immigration and discuss public policies to aid these Brazilians, who total over 3 million on all continents.

Over the last six years, Brazil has been trying to expand its consular network, mainly to provide greater support to Brazilian immigrants, which are now spread all around the world.

One of the countries that received a Brazilian consulate was Lebanon, an Arab country that concentrates the greatest Brazilian population in the Middle East, with around 5,000 people.

For this reason, among the authorities and representatives of organizations that provide support to Brazilians abroad, the Brazilian consul to Beirut, Michael Gepp, was also invited.

According to him, the situation of the Brazilians in the Arab country is very different from that of Brazilians living in the United States or Europe. "We have no Brazilians who travel to Lebanon searching for a job," said Gepp.

One of the main reasons for Brazilians to travel to Lebanon is to visit relatives, as in Brazil there are around 8 million Lebanese and descendants. "For this reason, the Brazilian population fluctuates very much," stated the consul-general.

Another differential of the Brazilians who live in Lebanon with regard to the communities in other countries is the question of illegality. "No Brazilian traveling to Lebanon is illegal in the country," said Gepp.

Another point is the question of money transfers of Brazilian immigrants, which also does not take place in the Arab country. "It is a Brazilian community that is slightly different from those of other countries, but I think our presence in this meeting is important," he said.

The concern of the government of Brazil with its immigrants caused the Itamaraty to open an Under Secretariat-General for Brazilian Communities Abroad, in 2006. The organization is in charge of the event, which counts on the support of Alexandre de Gusmão Foundation (Funag), also connected to the ministry.

Specialists and government authorities have discussed themes like migration and international law, migratory control, the profile of Brazilian communities abroad, political representation of the Brazilian Diaspora, government activities regarding Brazilian communities in the labor, social security and education areas, money transfer and the government policy for the Brazilian Diaspora.

Representatives of the Brazilian communities in the United States, where the biggest Brazilian community overseas is concentrated, Europe, South America and Japan have exchanged experiences and chose topics that were discussed in plenary sessions.

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