

## The 3rd National Program on Human Rights and Abortion Decriminalization in Brazil

### Government wants to withdraw part of speech that refers to women's autonomy over their bodies

Supported by the 3<sup>rd</sup>. Edition of the National Program for Human Rights (PNDH-3), the abortion decriminalization issue is under pressure from conservative groups and threatened to be separated from the women's cause. The program's text referring to women's autonomy that places the right to abortion as a human right meant trouble to the Catholic Church, whose demands President Lula tends to give way to. The CNBB – National Conference of Brazilian Bishops took a stand against the proposition and would rather accept a more generic content referring to public health issues only. CNBB's declaration that was published in January states that the PNDH-3 “brings dissension elements that demand time to allow the dialogue exercise”, and “reaffirming its position, manifested many times, in defense of life and the family, and against the decriminalization of abortion, against marriage between people of the same sex and the right of adoption of children by homosexual couples.”

The South Regional 1 Committee in Defense of Life even called President Lula “Erodes” after his including some points that favored abortion decriminalization in the program. Paulo Vannuchi, the Human Rights Special Office Ministry signaled on last Feb. 27 that he is going to give way to such pressures by declaring that the text referring to abortion decriminalization should be changed and the second part of the content that says “To support abortion decriminalization *having in mind women's autonomy to rule over their own bodies*” should be excluded, with the excuse that it stands from the feminist movement's approach and not the government's. How come those demands should be “cut out” from the plan, differently than others? Vannuchi's idea of a “healthy step back” makes CCR – Committee for Reproduction and Citizenship fear for the future of the abortion decriminalization defended in the Program. This represents yet another situation that might threaten the State laicity and hopefully President Lula will not go with such retrocession but instead will fully sustain the terms in the PNDH-3's text until the end of his mandate, thus opening way to the implementation of the guidelines established.

### PNDH-3 and the abortion issue

The abortion issue appears in the Program as part of a strategic approach aimed at assuring women their rights to have provided “the conditions to the full exercise of their citizenship.”

The Program attests the “support to the approval of the bill in favor of abortion-decriminalization, *contemplating women's autonomy to rule over their bodies*” (part of the text that is threatened to be cut out) and further recommends that the Legislative Power adjusts the Penal Code to the abortion decriminalization.” It is predicted the implementation of mechanisms to monitor abortion services foreseen by law “in order to ensure that they are performed and an easy access is provided” and the “enlargement of legal abortion practice's legitimacy according to the commitments assumed by the Brazilian State in the milestone of the Peking Platform for Action”. When referring to the right to health, social security and healthcare services, it says “abortion should be regarded as a public health issue, guaranteeing the access to healthcare services in cases foreseen by law.”

The support to the abortion decriminalization in the country is unquestionably a huge step achieved at the 3rd Edition of the National Program for Human Rights, which resulted from discussions that took place in Brasilia during the 11<sup>th</sup> National Conference for Human Rights in December, 2008. CCR hopes that such victory is not

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endangered neither by Catholic Church pressures that disrespect the laic condition of the Brazilian State nor by games played behind the scenes in Brasilia during electoral campaigns. It is expected that the plan is integrally sustained and implemented and brings the essential advance on fundamental issues, among which the abortion decriminalization, thus guaranteeing the exercise of Human Rights in Brazil.