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**HUMAN RIGHTS BODIES AND MECHANISMS**

**Report of the President of the Human Rights Council on his visit to Brazil  
(25 to 30 April 2009)**

## I. INTRODUCTION

1. At the invitation of the Government of Brazil, I conducted a visit to the country from 25 to 30 April 2009. The visit included stops in Brasilia, Manaus, Rio de Janeiro and Salvador. First of all, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Government of Brazil for the invitation, the support it provided during my visit and its openness in fostering a sincere and constructive dialogue with the Human Rights Council. I also thank the United Nations Information Centre, in Rio de Janeiro for its contribution to the success of the visit.

2. In Brazil, I met with a number of Government authorities. In Manaus, I had the opportunity to meet President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, to whom I extended an invitation to attend the eleventh session of the Council and with whom I had a very constructive exchange of views on the efforts of Brazil to advance human rights domestically and internationally, vis-à-vis the Council. In Manaus, I also met with The Minister for Agrarian Development, Guilherme Cassel; the Minister for Human Rights, Paulo de Tarso Vannucchi; the National Justice Counsellor, the Honourable Judge Gilson Dipp; the Acting Minister for Health, Márcia Bassit Lameiro da Costa Mazzoli; the Acting Minister for the Environment, Izabella Mônica Vieira Teixeira; the Vice-Minister for Continued Education, André Lázaro; and Congresswoman Dalva Figueiredo of the State of Amapá. In Rio de Janeiro, I met Governor Sérgio Cabral Filho and several State secretaries and senior Government officials. In Salvador, I met the State Governor of Bahia, Jaques Wagner, and high-level Government officials. As detailed in the present report, these meetings provided a unique opportunity to learn about governmental efforts in Brazil to promote the living standards of Brazilians in a wide range of areas, such as the fight against extreme hunger and poverty, access to water and sanitation, the promotion of civil and political rights, access to health and education and the treatment of people with leprosy.

3. I also had the opportunity to meet representatives of civil society. In Brasilia, I received a representative of Conectas, a non-governmental organization with accreditation by the Economic and Social Council, who raised issues relating to the high number of extra-judicial killings in the favelas in Brazil and to the walls currently being built around some of them in Rio de Janeiro. In Rio de Janeiro, at favela da Maré, I met with the representatives of the local non-governmental organization Viva Rio, which made a presentation on the projects of social inclusion they were carrying out in the favela. Still at Favela da Maré, I attended a meeting organized by representatives of the non-governmental organization Global Justice, at which I interacted with a group of individuals who had lost family members to police killings and criminal violence. In Salvador, I visited the Olodum school of music, an institution maintained by the acclaimed Afro-Brazilian cultural group from Bahia, aimed at providing education and social inclusion through art and value of the African roots of the people of Bahia.

4. Finally, the visit provided a useful opportunity as it enabled me to describe to many high-level Brazilian authorities the work of the Human Rights Council and to stimulate cooperation between these authorities and its mechanisms. I also had the honour to deliver a lecture on the challenges and prospects of the Council at the Rio Branco Institute, the prestigious Brazilian diplomatic academy.

## II. BRAZIL: SOME EXPERIENCES, CHALLENGES AND PRACTICES IN HUMAN RIGHTS

### A. Fight against extreme poverty and hunger

5. The Government of Brazil has taken important measures to address the problem of extreme hunger and poverty. *Bolsa Família* (“Family Stipend”), was presented to me by governmental officials as the main strategy to achieve eradication of these scourges. The programme is a conditional cash-transfer mechanism, by which families earning less than R\$ 120 per capita per month receive a benefit of up to R\$ 95 on condition that their children attend classes at school and vaccination campaigns at public hospitals.

6. In 2008, the programme benefited 11 million families, or 44 million people. In 2009, the Government intends to extend the cash transfers to 13 million families. *Bolsa Família* is part of a larger strategy of the Government to combat hunger and poverty, called *Fome Zero* (“No Hunger”), which is a series of programmes that, besides *Bolsa Família*, includes initiatives such as the establishment of popular restaurants to serve the most needy communities in Brazil, the construction of cisterns in arid regions of the country and the provision of access to financial credit by small farmers.

### B. Undocumented persons

7. I witnessed the launch of a number of Government initiatives relating to human rights. One was the signature of an agreement between the Federal Government and all the Governments of the States of the Amazon region (Amazonas, Pará, Acre, Rondônia, Roraima, Amapá and Tocantins) to combat what local authorities define as the phenomenon of non-documentation or underregistration. In the Amazon, the number of people without documentation (especially birth certificates, but also death and marriage documentation) remains especially high. In 2006, 12.7 per cent of Brazilians born were not registered in their first year of life. In the Amazon region, the situation is far worse: in the State of Roraima alone, 42.8 per cent of newborns were not registered in that year.

8. According to the Government, the new agreement, *Compromisso Mais Amazônia pela Cidadania* (“Commitment more Amazon for citizenship”), promises to be an important tool to standardize and simplify the issue of documents by States. It would also ensure better accessibility to this important precondition to the exercise of civil and political rights. The Minister for Human Rights stressed that the Government of Brazil intends to eradicate cases of non-documentation by 2011. As part of these efforts, the Ministry of Human Rights is also promoting campaigns and task forces to mobilize local authorities and civil society to address the problem of undocumented persons.

### C. Access to water

9. In Salvador, the Governor detailed a joint initiative by the Federal Government and the Government of Bahia to address the problem of access to water in that State, called *Água para Todos* (“Water for All”). Access to water in Bahia is an issue of special concern, given that 58 per cent of its territory suffers from semi-arid climate conditions. According to the Governor, only 32 per cent of the rural population in Bahia had access to clean water before the

implementation of the programme. The goal is to increase that proportion to 51 per cent in 2010, by building 100,000 underground reservoirs for water and 1,800 wells. I also briefed the Governor on the initiatives by the Council to promote access to water. In particular, I mentioned the work undertaken by the independent expert on the issue of human rights obligations related to access to safe drinking water and sanitation, Catarina de Albuquerque, and encouraged the Government of Bahia to study the reports of the mandate-holder.

#### **D. Access to health**

10. The Acting Minister for Health noted that South-South cooperation, especially with Africa, in the area of health was a priority for the Government. Major partnerships have been established between African countries and Brazil to develop technical cooperation in all areas of health, including family health, maternal health and combating HIV/AIDS. The Government also had partnerships with many groups of African descent, to address and cure diseases affecting this particular community. She stated that the Government also paid special attention to other vulnerable groups, especially women, children and indigenous peoples.

11. The Acting Minister for Health also underlined the fact that the Government had achieved its goal of substantially reducing infant mortality rates. In 1990, the rate of deaths of children from 0 to 1 year of age was 46.9 per 1,000 births. In 2006, the rate had dropped to 24.9 deaths. Deaths of children from 0 to 5 years of age had also dropped by around 50 per cent in the same period.

#### **E. Leprosy**

12. I accompanied President Lula on a visit to Lar Azemor Gonçalves Pinheiro, a health centre devoted to the treatment of leprosy. The centre consists of 96 apartments organized in 12 different pavilions, each one with a large garden and facilities providing social and medical assistance. Each apartment, approximately 46 square metres large, has a living room, bedroom, kitchen, bathroom and laundry. Aiming at ensuring social conviviality and dignity to the victims of this crippling disease, the centre was a clear effort to overcome social stigma and discrimination. In 2007, Brazil approved an important law that guaranteed a monthly stipend to patients subjected to isolation and compulsory treatment of Hansen's disease in hospitals up until 1986, when such practices were abolished.

#### **F. Education and human rights**

13. The Vice-Minister for Continued Education emphasized that the Ministry of Education had policies and programmes that promoted education as a human right and education in human rights. In order to promote education as a human right, every public school provides every child with free food and books. Furthermore, the Government of Brazil was committed to ensuring that all citizens of Brazil are able to exercise their right to education and that primary education is compulsory in the country. Currently, there are 53 million students in Brazil. From 0 to 3 years of age, 17 per cent of the children are in school; from 4 to 5, the rate rises to 70 per cent in school; from 6 to 14, 97 per cent; and from 15 to 17 years, 82 per cent attend classes. From 18 to 24 years of age, however, the number drops to 13 per cent in school. According to the Vice-Minister, this was a good result given the size, diversity and complexity of the country. He emphasized that quality of education and equitable school attendance remained a challenge, as

shown by the low average that Brazilian students between 10 and 14 years of age obtained in scholastic aptitude exams. Equity in rural areas, in particular, was also a challenge.

14. It was noted that President Lula had signed an agreement to decrease the rate of illiteracy in young people and adults. Some 10 per cent of the population (14 million) were illiterate; of this, 1.2 million were in the northern Amazon region. The goal of the Government was to teach 800,000 in this group in the northern Amazon to read and write over the next two years.

15. The Government has also implemented a programme to foster education in human rights. The “Schools that protect” initiative is aimed at providing teachers with knowledge about human rights. As Brazil has the largest population of African descent outside Africa, the history of that continent and its culture is a compulsory subject in the curriculum of every public school in Brazil.

### **G. Urban violence**

16. I also had a meeting with family members of victims of police violence, organized by the non-governmental organization Global Justice, at Favela da Maré. There, I had the opportunity to listen to moving testimonies. I am especially thankful to the organization for convening the event, which allowed me to hear first-hand reports of killings that had occurred as recently as two weeks earlier, and about the virtual lack of security in the favela. I also received extensive documentation on many of these cases, which I have shared with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

17. I had the opportunity to talk to Government authorities of Rio de Janeiro about the above matter and expressed concern about this situation. The State Governor and other officials were open to dialogue and explained some of the efforts by the Government to combat violence. According to State authorities, the strategy of the Federal and State Governments to combat violence is to invest in programmes of social inclusion, including a major project of almost R\$ 1 billion to provide infrastructure, adequate housing and social programmes at Complexo do Alemão. Government officials assumed that crimes perpetrated by police officers would be carefully investigated.

### **H. International cooperation in the promotion of human rights**

18. I discussed a number of important Brazilian programmes of cooperation in human rights with President Lula. He mentioned the initiative of his Government to open a factory of antiretroviral medicines, including drugs for treating HIV/AIDS, in Mozambique. The factory, which will provide low-cost and high-quality medicines to African countries, is a concrete step to combat diseases that still cost the lives of hundreds of thousands of Africans every year, such as HIV/AIDS and malaria. The inauguration of a regional office of the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (Embrapa) in Ghana was also mentioned. The aim of the office is to enable producers and small farmers to plant in areas previously considered unsuitable for agriculture, leading to the improvement of conditions of access to food and distribution of wealth.

**I. Other experiences**

19. I also attended a ceremony of distribution of land titles to families living on agriculture, who thus became owners of the land that they had long informally possessed. Property titles represent both the legal stability and the protection that the farmers have long waited for; access to credit will ultimately permit important improvements in the infrastructure and technology applied to their work.

20. Finally, I also participated in the launching of the national plan for productive chains of social biodiversity, aiming at promoting natural extractive activities without deforestation or any other environmental damage. The activities take advantage of goods naturally produced by the forest, adding value to these products and ensuring that sustainable use of the Amazon forest is a viable and profitable economic activity.

**III. CONCLUSION**

21. It is my firm belief that visits by the President of the Human Rights Council to other countries is a practice that should be encouraged. They represent an opportunity to enhance political dialogue, disseminate knowledge on the work of the Council and receive a concrete overview on the challenges and experiences of countries in the field of human rights.

22. My visit to Brazil provided a unique opportunity to learn, listen and speak: to learn about Government initiatives, to listen to victims, and to speak about the work of the Council. A country as diverse as its continental dimension suggests, Brazil faces complex challenges in the field of human rights. From the jungles of the Amazon region to the urban environment of major cities, difficulties and necessities vary substantially. The visit was an opportunity to establish a high-level political dialogue with Government officials about the country's experience in areas directly related to the promotion and protection of human rights.

23. It is my evaluation that this interaction was an important tool in identifying experiences, practices and challenges that are worth sharing with the Council, for the benefit of other Members States of the United Nations, as much as for Brazil. In this sense, I invited the President to address the Council at the eleventh session to explain some of the above-mentioned initiatives. I am confident that a frank interaction on successes and shortcomings, difficulties and achievements, challenges and best practices is an effective way to promote a constructive environment conducive to a meaningful and sincere discussion of important human rights issues.

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