



Our sexual and reproductive rights are not negotiable!

Beatriz Galli, the Special Rapporteur on the Human Right to Sexual and Reproductive Health of the Human Rights Platform - Dhesca Brazil - denounces a major regression in the realm of sexual and reproductive rights and requests transparent information about the reasons that have led the Minister of Health, Dr. Arthur Chioro, to suspend few days ago Ordinance No. 415 of May 21, 2014. The suspended ordinance is of particular importance for the full realization of women's sexual and reproductive rights in Brazil, as it established definitions for properly recording and compensating health services for the implementation of legal abortion procedures. Ordinance 415 was in full accordance with Decree No. 7,958 of 13 March 2013 that established health care guidelines for the effective response to the needs of victims of sexual violence in the public health network. It was aimed at precisely identifying legal abortion procedures and defining new levels of financial coverage for these procedures. These measures would favor the collection of data and accurate statistics in this particular realm of reproductive health. This data is urgently needed for the design and improvement of policies and programs, contributing to reduce the underreporting of these procedures, which are not easily captured by the existing health care information databases.

The suspension of the ordinance is another strong sign that Brazilian women do not count with the necessary support from the state to make reproductive decisions and be protected from unsafe procedures if they experience unwanted pregnancies, even in those cases in which termination is permitted by law. The right to choose abortion in the cases provided for by law has been for a long time under the systematic attack on the part of conservative sectors that oppose women's reproductive autonomy. It is the view of the Special Rapporteur on the Human Right to Sexual and Reproductive Health Rapporteur that under the existing democratic rules and the principles of *laïcité* embraced by our Constitution in its article 19 -- which implies the separation between political decision and religious faith -- public officials should not submit to such pressures. It is the duty of the Brazilian State to protect the rights of women and to oppose conservative and contrary initiatives in the area of sexual and reproductive health, whenever existing legislation guarantee those rights. This is necessary for the

consolidation of a democratic state and to ensure respects to existing legal frameworks and policies that guide the response to women's health needs, based on their human right to equal access to health and non-discrimination.

Data informs that many Brazilian women experience high levels of vulnerability, as in the case of black, young and unmarried women or of those who are unemployed, those living in distant locations in major urban centers, those who have lower education levels and are submitted to poorer socio - economic conditions. These women are at greater risk of preventable maternal death and suffer drastic complications as a consequence of unsafe abortions. The 1940 criminal law that criminalizes abortion put all Brazilian women at risk of maternal death and preventable pregnancy related morbidity. These risks are further increased by the poor implementation of access to safe abortion in those cases permitted by law. In suspending Ordinance 415, the Minister of Health has taken a further step back in what concerns the health care measures required for Brazil to meet the Millennium Goals target in relation to safe motherhood, gender equality and universal access to sexual and reproductive health.

It is particularly unfortunate that this decision takes place exactly when the 20 years of International Conference of Population and Development is celebrated, a milestone in the international agenda of population, development and reproductive and sexual rights. Our sexual and reproductive rights are non negotiable. Their respect and guarantee is what is what is expected from a state that is secular democratic and solidly grounded in the rule of law.