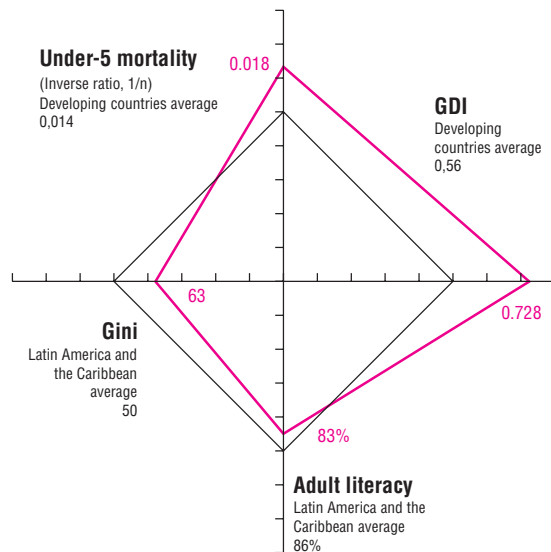


• ATILA ROQUE  
SONIA CORREA

## THE SOCIAL CYCLE AGENDA: «IMPASSES» AND CHALLENGES



The Equity Diamond: National values in terracotta compared to regional ones in blue.

*The gravity of the Brazilian social situation is explained more by the extreme inequality of income distribution among the various segments of the population, than by the structural absence of economic resources.*

In this third edition of the international Social Watch report, we do not repeat data treated in depth in previous editions. Rather, we seek to clarify aspects related to the dynam-

ics of social exclusion. We also review the extent to which commitments made in the cycle of United Nations social conferences are being integrated in Brazilian public policies.

In Brazil, democratic radicalisation implies overcoming a brutal model of social inequality. This was one of the main conclusions of a seminar organised by Social Watch in Brazil, with the participation of NGOs, social movements, universities and the government. The struggle against social exclusion demands, initially, recognition that Brazil is not a poor country. Comparative analysis (Paes y Barros, R. and Mendonca R., 1997) shows that more than 75% of the world population live in countries with a per capita income lower than that of Brazil. Moreover, the country has an average per capita income which would allow for the implementation of redistribution policies with no great costs in terms of economic growth. That is, the resources are available to eradicate absolute poverty in the country. Therefore, the problem lies in the political field, in terms of both strategy and will.

### STABILISATION AND ANTI-POVERTY POLICY

The main argument used by those who defend structural adjustment and economic stabilisation policies –as they are being implemented in Brazil through the «Plano Real»– is that their effects on redistribution are already per se an effective «social policy». This is because of the elimination of the so-called «inflationary tax», which had weighed heavily on the income of poorer sectors.

Cohn's (1997) analysis shows how this argument has gutted discussion of a new «social solidarity pact» that would permit formulation of economic and social policies promoting redistribution. The «Plano Real» also limits the resources available for social policies in the fiscal budget, since it includes the creation of new taxes and mechanisms for collecting revenues that permit more flexible use of funds by the Executive.<sup>1</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> As an example of a tax we have the approval of the *Provisional Contribution on the Financial Movement (CPMF)*, in place since early 1997, the funds from which are dedicated by law to the health area, and as a collection mechanism we had the creation of the *Fiscal Stabilisation Fund*, a contribution from company profits.

sustainability of social policy will thus remain dependent on an unstable and/or provisional resource base, subject to the vicissitudes of economic policy.

This same logic explains the lack of definition of a national policy on minimum income. In the absence of a global policy, states and municipal administrations have developed their own initiatives. At present there are more than 80 minimum income projects in the country, but only four of them are being effectively implemented.

### MINIMUM INCOME PROGRAMMES

The minimum income programmes vary from one country to another. There are, however, some common elements:

- 1) they are universal, aimed at all those in need because they have insufficient income;
- 2) they are a subjective right, that is, they are attributed only when the interested party makes a demand;
- 3) they are a conditional right, since they depend on respect for certain prerogatives and, in some cases, the fulfillment of certain criteria, such as the willingness to work at available jobs;
- 4) they are a subsidiary right, that is their value is adjusted according to the amount of other social benefits received and according to the income, either of the individual or family group.

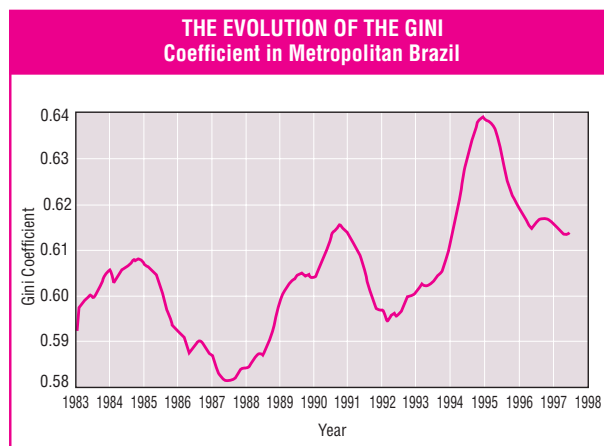
Most of the minimum income programmes in Brazil are experimental. Amongst these, municipal programmes in Campinas, Vitsria and Belo Horizonte have some common characteristics: they help mainly families with children under 14 years old, so that the youngsters can attend school regularly; they require a minimum time of residence in the area before the benefit is granted; and they stipulate a minimum per capita family income, generally around 40 Reals. The Federal District is the only state with a permanent programme, which currently serves around 25,000 families.

On the federal front, two bills that would guarantee a minimum income to needy families are working their way through the National Congress. Both link the payment of benefits to public school attendance of children or dependants under the age of 14. Both programmes involve the joint participation of the three levels of government.

Source: Helena Lavinás, IPEA.

Without negating the benefits of economic stabilisation, it is important to explain the impact of the «Plano Real» on poverty and inequality in Brazil. According to data analysed by IPEA (Paes and Barros, R. and Mendonca R., 1997), the indices of

inequality in Brazil (measured by the Gini coefficient) reached extreme peaks in 1994–1995 during the initial implementation of the «Plano Real». Although the poverty indices for 1996–1997 are lower than those of 1994, they are still higher than the indices for 1993. A similar pattern exists for wealth distribution indicators.



Source: Based on the Monthly Employment Surveys (PME) from June 1982 to June 1997.

Note: The distribution is of individuals according to per capita family income of all the workers.

Note: Figure created by IPEA, 1997.

Brief profile of inequality

- The inequality of income distribution in Brazil is among the worst in the world: the average income of the richest 10% is nearly 30 times that of the poorest 40%.
- It is not the presence of the poorest sectors that makes Brazil an unequal country, but the extremely high average income of the richest sectors. The inequality among the 80% of the population that is not very rich is equivalent to inequality in other countries, such as the United States.
- Inequality in Brazil has increased systematically. Today it is much higher than in the first half of the 1980's.

### HETEROGENEOUS INEQUALITY

The Brazilian standards of inequality vary greatly when regional differences are taken into account. There is a systematic disparity between the patterns of income in the northeast – where 45% of the population live in poverty – and the other regions of the country (Brazilian Human Development Report, 1996). Significant differences also appear when employment and the way people are inserted into the work market are analysed. There are large inequalities between the incomes of workers with work certificates and those without. The same holds for the incomes of salaried workers and independent workers.

Evolution of Inequality*													
Inequality Indicators	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1992	1993	1995
Proportion of income received by the poorest 10%	0.78	0.76	0.76	0.82	0.76	0.81	0.67	0.59	0.54	0.58	0.40	0.38	0.43
Proportion of income received by the poorest 20%	2.5	2.4	2.4	2.6	2.4	2.5	2.2	2.0	1.9	2.0	1.9	1.8	1.9
Proportion of income received by the poorest 30%	5.0	4.8	4.8	5.1	4.8	5.0	4.5	4.2	3.8	4.1	4.3	4.1	4.2
Proportion of income received by the poorest 40%	8.4	8.1	8.1	8.4	8.0	8.4	7.7	7.2	6.6	7.1	7.8	7.4	7.3
Proportion of income received by the poorest 50%	12.9	12.5	12.3	12.7	12.3	12.8	12.0	11.2	10.4	11.2	12.4	11.6	11.6
Gini coefficient	0.59	0.6	0.6	0.59	0.60	0.6	0.61	0.62	0.64	0.62	0.59	0.61	0.61
Degree of inequality**	82/0	78/0	78/0	92/0	78/0	89/0	57/0	38/-4	26/-11	36/-4	7/-6	0/-10	

\*\*Source: IPEA. Developed on the basis of information from the National Survey of a Sample of Homes (PNAD)

Notes: \*The distribution used is that of individuals according to per capita family income.

\*\*The first figure refers to the increase in income in 1995, measured as a percentage of the annual income of the column, that was necessary in 1995 to have a level of poverty lower than the reference year; the second figure refers to the reduction of income in 1995, measured as a percentage of the annual income of the column, that was necessary in 1995 to have a level of poverty higher than the reference year.

- The year 1995 is not comparable with the reference year in the column.
- The year 1995 shows a greater value for the indicator in question than that referred to in the column.
- The year 1995 shows a lower value for the indicator in question than that referred to in the column.

Two factors cross all the different types of social inequality and are deeply rooted in Brazilian culture: gender and race. Being a woman or belonging to an ethnic group influences the chances of social inclusion in Brazil. Blacks and mixed race people<sup>2</sup> earn on average 40% to 50% less than whites, and men receive an average of 42% more than women.

These data are confirmed when qualitatively strategic indicators, such as education, are considered. Lavina (1997) found that the length of schooling affected men and women differently in terms of employment and income. Apart from the differences in salary between men and women of the same educational level, the positive effect of more years of schooling on the rate of employment tended to be less beneficial for women than men, especially for people who had reached between first and second grade.

In the case of the black population, a study recently carried out by FASE<sup>3</sup> researchers applied the methodology used by the UNDP for the Human Development Indicator (HDI) to compare the socio-economic situation of the Afro-Brazilian population. The results showed the HDI of the Afro-Brazilian population varied between 0.575 and 0.607, depending on the criteria used for the definition of income, that is, it is far lower than the average national HDI, which is 0.796. By international standards, the HDI of the black and mestizo population would be at most

medium-low and would occupy 109th position in the world ranking.

## GROWTH AND INEQUALITY

The Brazilian social situation is explained more by the extremely high index of unequal income distribution than by the absence of economic resources. A development strategy that does not take this into account—even though it may stimulate high indices of economic growth—deepens the breach that separates the very rich from the indigent. Analysing recent data on poverty, inequality and economic growth, Paes and Barros, R. and Mendonca R. (1996) show that development policies strictly based on economic growth were not effective in eradicating absolute poverty.

This does not mean economic growth must be discarded as a social inclusion factor. However, considering the dimensions of the Brazilian economy and the available resources, strategies to overcome inequality are more effective than growth per se. According to the authors cited above, a small reduction in inequality, equivalent to a variation of barely 0.05 in the Gini coefficient, corresponds to a whole decade of eco-

<sup>2</sup> In the *National Homes Survey (PNDA)* carried out by the *Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE)*, in 1997, the «blacks» appeared as 5.5% of the total population, the «mixed race» 37.2%, the «yellows» 0.6% and the «whites» 56.4%. This excluded the rural population of the North East region.

<sup>3</sup> Paixao, Marcelo e Sant'anna, Wania. «*Desenvolvimento humano e População Afro-Descendente no Brasil: uma questao de raca*» Revista Proposta, FASE, Rio de Janeiro, Junho/Agosto de 1997.

conomic growth at 2.6% per year. **Hence, a consistent strategy of social and human development in Brazil must combine economic growth with effective action to overcome inequality. The strategy must recognise the different ways in which the inclusion–exclusion dynamic affects the various sectors of Brazilian society, in particular the black/mestizo population and women.**

### IMPLEMENTING POLICIES: DYNAMICS AND CONTRADICTIONS

The implementation of the Social Cycle Agenda in Brazil is conditioned by factors that are not specifically Brazilian, including the logic that favours stabilisation and economic growth over the promotion of equity. Other, specifically Brazilian factors must also be taken into account: the standard of inequality; the regional, social and racial heterogeneity of the country; the decentralisation of policies; and the shackles of political and cultural models in Brazil.

The 1997 Social Watch report listed some policies brought about by the Social Cycle Agenda: The National Human Rights Programme; the fight against infant mortality; the prioritisation of primary education; the initiatives taken by the National Council of Women's Rights; and the establishment of the National Commission for Population and Development.

The human rights conventions have been ratified, social policies have been decentralised, and there are mechanisms for social participation and control (health, education, children and adolescents, women). A new regulatory framework is being discussed for the CSOs.<sup>4</sup> The diagnostics of the work market are also being improved.<sup>5</sup> There is labour legislation to protect against discrimination (children, women and the disabled). There are policies to support small and medium-sized enterprises. The national system of professional standards is being reformed. Employment and income generation programmes are being developed with the direct involvement of the unions.<sup>6</sup>

In the promotion of work and income, the Agrarian Reform Policy is, without doubt, the most relevant, since it influences a determining factor in Brazil's social inequality: concentrated

land ownership. However, the relative advances in the Agrarian Reform Policy for the period 1996 to 1998 were due to systematic pressure from the Landless Workers' Movement (MST) and the emergence of serious agrarian conflicts, and not their prior definition as a government priority.

Brazilian legislation against racial discrimination is rigorous.<sup>7</sup> In 1996, a Ministerial Group for the Valorisation of the Black Population was created. Although its quality and effectiveness are questionable, policies specifically directed to the indigenous populations have been established. The national policy for the protection of children and adolescents, backed by specific legislation (the Statute of the Child and the Adolescent), is well developed. Since 1994, the Foreign Ministry has been implementing a programme of consular support for Brazilian migrants living abroad.

Since the 1980's, legislation and programmes against gender discrimination and violence have been in place. In 1995, quotas were set for women in the election lists. Affirmative action initiatives are being debated in the labour markets. A National Equality Plan was drawn up in order to implement the recommendations of the Beijing Conference. That has been replicated in state and municipal programmes.<sup>8</sup> In July 1997, a Special Commission to Accompany the Implementation of the Beijing Platform of Action was created by the National Congress.

In health, programmes to extend access to drinking water and sewerage are underway, especially in the north and north-east. An HIV/AIDS Prevention and Assistance Programme has been underway since the 1980's.<sup>9</sup> The programme of Integral Health Assistance for Women is being revitalised and aims have been announced for the reduction of maternal mortality.

This brief account suggests that the Brazilian government is fulfilling the commitments made in Beijing and Copenhagen. However, a closer look reveals important stumbling blocks. **The social policies are fragmentary, ineffective and lack systematic evaluation. Above all, up until now, no National Plan for the Eradication of Absolute Poverty has been defined.**

From 1995 to 1997, analyses of the composition and distribution of absolute poverty in the country have multiplied. Initiatives – co-ordinated by the «Comunidade Solidaria» (Supportive Community) – are underway to fight poverty in 1,368 municipal areas. The agenda lists 14 programmes with six com-

<sup>4</sup> The initiative which is made up of the *Supportive Community Council*, the *National Social Assistance Council* and the *Brazilian NGO Association*.

<sup>5</sup> This included the definition of the new indicators for measuring unemployment as the different sources producing information on the work market – FIBGE, DIEESE, the SEAD Foundation – have used different methodologies and criteria for measuring. This initiative has the support of the ILO

<sup>6</sup> The union groups which participate in the *Worker Protection Fund Negotiating Council* which is the basic source of funding for the programmes.

<sup>7</sup> The *Afonso Arinos Law* (1952), improved by the *Caó Law* (1988) which define racism as a crime.

<sup>8</sup> In the State of Rio de Janeiro, the *State Council for the Female Condition* (CEDIM) is developing a programme to internalise the Beijing Platform, involving more than 70 municipal authorities with the formal adhesion of the mayor's offices

<sup>9</sup> The *National HIV/AIDS Programme* is funded by the World Bank and is structured in various components (research, epidemiological monitoring, prevention, assistance) and includes an alliance with NGOs. Since 1996, the protease inhibitors (antiviral cocktail) are being distributed free by the *Single Health System* to HIV carriers.

ponents: reduction of child mortality; nutrition; support for primary education; urban development; rural development; income generation and professional training.<sup>10</sup> The strategy prioritises the smaller and poorer municipal areas, thus excluding the metropolitan regions which are home to 29% of Brazil's poor.

Given the level of social inequality in Brazil, analysis shows that these initiatives are insufficient. Similarly, given the strong correlation between low educational levels and social inequality, some authors consider the educational policy to be too timid (Paes and Barros, 1997, amongst others). In 1996, the aim of universal primary education was set for the year 2007. Investments are being made in infrastructure and new teaching technologies are being developed.<sup>11</sup> The new Law of Guidelines and Bases (LDB), the Fund for the Assessment of Education and Teachers (FVEM), and the process of municipalisation all guide these. The FVEM established minimum funding of 300 Reals per capita/student/year, of which 60% is linked to paying the salaries of qualified teachers. If states cannot afford 300 Reals per capita/year, the federal government makes up the shortfall.

Haddad (1997) marked as positive elements: the comparison of resources on an interstate level; the greater control over the allocation of resources; and linkage to payment of teachers' salaries. But he stressed that the LDB did not include measures for the eradication of illiteracy, and that the FVEM did not plan funding for supplementary education. The FVEM also did away with the gradual second grade obligatoriness. Illiterate adults and youngsters who repeat or miss years –two large contingents of the population– will thus be excluded. The MEC itself admitted in July 1997 that \$300 per capita/year is a «minimum amount» and that the policy does not lead to redistribution on a macro scale, as it does not promote transference between units of the federation. (Guimaraes, 1997).

The proposed increase in investments in education is becoming more relevant. In September 1997, the Interior Ministry recognised that the positive impacts of stabilisation on poverty had come to an end, and that basic education would be the strategic priority for the next few years (Folha de Sao Paulo, 14/09/1997). At the same time, the MEC rescheduled the deadline for achieving universal primary education to 2004 and announced a proposal to eradicate illiteracy within ten years (Folha de Sao Paulo, 16/09/1997). The effectiveness of these new guidelines, however, appears to be conditional on a clearer definition of funding terms and criteria for allocating funds. The latter is fundamental,

since in Brazil, although funds may be plentiful, they do not always reach the neediest groups, nor are they specifically aimed at meeting basic needs.<sup>12</sup>

## DECENTRALISATION: MERITS AND LIMITATIONS

Decentralisation of social policies is advanced for education, health, children and adolescents, and for programmes pinpointed on combating poverty. Experience shows that decentralisation permits better adaptation of policies to regional and local diversity and to specific needs of the population. It broadens possibilities for social control, and it may potentially lead to a better distribution of income and expenditure among states and regions.

**However, the transfer of resources and grants among the Union, states and municipal areas remains difficult.** Some municipal areas fund 80% of their social budgets themselves, but there are states and municipal areas whose income is entirely dependent on federal grants. In view of this, Haddad (1997) suggested that placing education under municipal control should not automatically be considered as positive; it depends on how decentralisation is carried out and, above all, on more effective redistribution of resources at the federal level.

Moreover, the rules of decentralisation are heterogeneous. In the case of education, the division of responsibility (among federal, state and municipal levels) is well defined. In the health sector, the decentralisation of assistance contrasts with federally centralised funding. Up until now, there are no rules to guide the decentralisation of the National Human Rights Programme and the promotion of sexual equality, which means that its implementation remains at the mercy of local logic. This heterogeneity, above all, makes implementation of intersectoral strategies more difficult.

One novelty in this field is the decentralisation of employment and income generation initiatives. In 1992, barely 363 of the nearly 5,000 Brazilian municipal authorities implemented policies and programmes in this area. Currently, special secretariats are being created at municipal level and 800 state and municipal employment commissions are operating, involving governmental, union and CSO bodies. The National Programme for Professional Training (Planfor) trained 1.2m people in 1996,

<sup>10</sup> They are the following 14 programmes: *Against Mother and Child Malnutrition, National Immunisation Programme, Community Health Agents Programme, Basic Sanitation Action, National Food Programme, Food Distribution Programme, Integral Student Health Assistance Programme, National School Transport Programme, Child Education Programme, Social Action Sanitation Programme, Habitar–Brazil Programme, National Programme for Strengthening Family Agriculture, Employment and Income Generation Programme, National Professional Training Programme*

<sup>11</sup> The priorities include the *School TV Programme* which aims at expanding access to television technology to all the basic network of primary education.

<sup>12</sup> Various Brazilian social policies benefit the higher income groups, to the detriment of the poorer sectors. The funding is not always aimed towards resolving problems which affect the poorest groups. From 1994 to 1997, the *Single Health System* spent more than 500,000 dollars/year on hospital procedures directly related to reproductive health. Meanwhile, there are still too few resources for health promotion and preventative measures which would constitute a basic investment to reduce female morbidity and mortality amongst the poorest women.

1.6m in 1997 and is expecting to train 8m workers by 1999. The programme should absorb an investment of \$320m in 1997.

But, according to Mehedeff (1997), the federal level still has excessive control over the programme and has not invested adequately in strengthening local institutions. Above all, local employment strategies should be able to influence macro-economic policies, such as constitutional funds for labour creation, industrial strategies and investments in infrastructure. However, such decisions frequently occur outside the influence and power of local people and the recently established employment commissions (Cunha, 1997).

## CULTURE AND POLITICS

The implementation of the Social Cycle Agenda in Brazil is also up against limits imposed by cultural styles and political logic. The performance of the National Human Rights Programme is a good example. Even though one of its priorities is to combat violence perpetrated by the state, the programme also covers the human, civil and political rights of men, women, children, adolescents, convicts, refugees, migrants, police, foreigners, old people, the physically disabled, HIV carriers, the dispossessed, homosexuals, whites, blacks, yellows, Indians and ethnic groups.

Actions have concentrated on: arms control and disarmament in areas of critical violence; human rights training for the police; protection for victims and witnesses; the eradication of forced labour and child labour; and the implementation of ILO Convention 111 on positive action strategies (race and gender). The CSOs have evaluated this development positively. But they consider that, since it does not include the defence of economic and social rights, its impact will always be limited in the context of the accentuated social inequalities in Brazil (Almeida, 1997).

Santos (1997), who is a member of the co-ordinating council of part of the National Human Rights Programme, said the greatest challenge is how to get other governmental bodies and society itself to make the bases of this programme theirs. In Brazil, the notion that human rights are limited to defending citizens against State violence is still prevalent. Social representations still carry the message that human rights «defend

the bad guys.» Over all, there is strong resistance to addressing gender and, especially, race based discrimination.

As a result, a State Minister had no qualms about making racist comments in a public forum where the National Rights Programme was being developed (Carneiro, 1997).<sup>13</sup> When evaluating the current policies on professional training, Mehedeff (1997) suggested this bias runs right through the Brazilian socio-institutional fabric: «The most efficient professional training institutions are white, urban, industrialist, male, and, principally, private. They do not aim to make the opportunities offered by stability and economic growth available to all layers and social groups in an egalitarian manner.»

Cultural barriers are increased by political contradictions. Public social policies are developed in a conflictive forum where many «political wills» come in to play. There are, for example, flagrant tensions between the various levels of the Executive, and between the Executive and the Legislative and Judicial branches.<sup>14</sup> Above all, we must not lose sight of the fact that policies are defined on the basis of the play of interests inside the state apparatus. Prioritising stabilisation and growth at the expense of policies to reduce inequality shows the tug of war between diverging interests in Brazilian society.

Since 1995, a pitched battle is underway in the federal legislature over compliance with international recommendations related to abortion as a serious public health problem.<sup>15</sup> The implementation of a more equitable health policy has always conflicted with interests of the public health care sector. Above all, just as internalisation of the Social Cycle Agenda has been weak, the political composition of the federal government is often problematic for the implementation of the relevant social policies.<sup>16</sup> Hence, although civil society efforts at monitoring and advocacy require a qualified technical framework, they will always imply a political dimension in the classic sense of the term.

- IBASE (co-ordination), CEDEC, FASE, INESC, SOS-CORPO make up the Social Watch reference group.

<sup>13</sup> Transport minister Eliseu Padilha, when taking up his post in the first semester of 1997 said: «There are two blacks who are admired by all Brazil. One is Pelé, who is our king forever. The other is the king asphalt, the black everyone loves.» The existence of racism in daily life has led the movements protecting the black population to persistent denunciations and the opening of legal action against the State, public personalities, and the mass media.

<sup>14</sup> Rio Grande do Sul took constitutional action to censure the initiative promoted by the National Council of Women's Rights to prioritise access to housing for women heads of household. The action is based on the argument that the proposal contradicts the constitutional premise of sexual equality.

<sup>15</sup> In 1995, an amendment was proposed to include the premise of the right to life from the moment of conception in the Constitution. In 1997, there was a tough debate related to the bill which forced the public health service to carry out terminations of pregnancy in legally permitted cases: rape and risk to a woman's life.

<sup>16</sup> A forceful illustration of this was the appointment of a new Justice Minister in the first semester of 1997, whose public stances contradict, in substantial aspects, some of the basic premises of the *National Human Rights Programme*, until then already established in the Ministry in question.

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