

## THE INCOMPLETENESS OF DEMOCRACY IN BRAZIL AND THE BACKLASH OF HUMAN RIGHTS

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The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, was adopted by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, in 1948, came at a good time for Brazil, as the country had just returned to democracy after the 1937-1945 dictatorship of the Estado Novo.

Despite the return to democracy, however, during the period that went from 1946 to 1964 – the year Brazil suffered another coup – the Declaration had little influence. Here and there, jurists or internationalists spoke up, but neither the Brazilian state nor broader civil society took any of the precepts of the Declaration into account.<sup>1</sup> There was no reference to human rights, for example, in directives about how the police should operate or in how prisons should be administered in the states.

Brazil opened its eyes to human rights during the military dictatorship – especially during the ten final years of the regime, between 1974 and 1985, when knowledge about the crimes carried out by military agents had become increasingly widespread.

But Brazil found itself among good company in the international system. Even though the UN Commission on Human Rights (CHR<sup>2</sup>), under the leadership of Eleanor Roosevelt, had been created in 1946 following the drafting of the Declaration, during its first three decades of existence it did not carry out any human rights monitoring. Why? Out of fear that racism in the US against Black Americans would lead to an avalanche of complaints and accusations being filed with the Commission.

Accusations of human rights violations only began to be investigated starting in 1979, when a UN special rapporteur was appointed to examine the Pinochet dictatorship. At almost the same time, a working group on racism in South Africa was created by the CHR. Thereafter, different mandates for special rapporteurs were created: first to address the human rights situation in countries, and subsequently to address specific issues.

What happened in Brazil after the return to civilian government, initially in 1985 and, later, under the new constitution of 1988? The Brazilian state would end up

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1 On this topic, see one of the only studies that exist: Battibugli, Thaís. *Polícia, Democracia e Política em São Paulo - 1946 – 1964*. São Paulo, Editora Humanitas, 2010.

2 In 2006, the Commission on Human Rights, (UNCHR) established in 1946, when the UN was founded, was replaced by the Human Rights Council (UNHRC)

incorporating the grammar of human rights, without taking refuge in a *denial* that it violated human rights. Thus, 1985 represents both a return to civilian government and the beginning of a state policy on human rights. From then on, regardless of the parties that were in power, those accords based on the Declaration and on the international pacts and conventions that followed were quickly signed and ratified by the Brazilian Congress.

Brazil was one of the first countries to sign the Convention against Torture, with President José Sarney speaking at the Human Rights Assembly in 1985, and Brazil also took the opportunity to sign the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which the dictatorship had not signed. These texts were subsequently ratified by Congress, thanks mainly to Senators Severo Gomes, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, and Eduardo Suplicy.

During the Itamar Franco administration, the first assembly of human rights entities was held at the Foreign Affairs Ministry (known as Itamaraty), when Fernando Henrique Cardoso was Foreign Affairs Minister. It was a very exciting occasion, because it was the first time that NGOs and human rights defenders were setting foot inside the Ministry.

These advances spurred the intense participation by Brazilian civil society at the World Conference in Vienna in 1993, with Brazilian NGOs focused on Afro-descendants, women, children, indigenous people, the LGBT community, and a wide range of human rights entities meeting during every day of the conference with the delegation from the Brazilian government – a government that had recently shed its military dictatorship. I lived through those days, and it felt like a great moment. The declaration and program that came out of the conference – largely thanks to Brazilian ambassador Gilberto Sabóia, the chairman of the drafting committee – defined democracy as the political system best able to protect human rights, and affirmed that they are inseparable from civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

One of the provisions recommended by the Vienna Program was the creation of National Human Rights Programs. Then, when Fernando Henrique Cardoso became President, his administration took on the task of preparing its own National Human Rights Program (PNDH in Portuguese). The first Program, PNDH 1, was launched in 1996, and included as its rapporteur the eminent political scientist and human rights activist Paulo de Mesquita Neto, whose absence we lament every day. In 2002, PNDH 2 followed, and for the first time ever the Brazilian state promoted policies to affirm the rights of its Black

population. And then, during the Lula administration, with Paulo Vannuchi as Minister of Human Rights, PNDH 3 was enacted, with the prefaces from previous PNDH being included in the text, indicating a continuity in the state's human rights policy.

Without exception, the state's human rights policies were expanded by every Brazilian administration, all the way through to the government of Dilma Rousseff, who set up the National Truth Commission. With the publication of the Commission's report in 2014, it became clear that human rights violations, arbitrary arrests, kidnappings, disappearances, murders and torture were all part of state policy under the dictatorship, with the generals presiding over the Republic commanding it all. The senior leadership in charge of torture, such as Colonel Ustra, were employed at the Army Minister's office.

Unfortunately, impunity for those crimes and human rights violations committed by agents of the military dictatorship was initially consecrated through a self-amnesty decree and later, in 2010, by the Federal Supreme Court (STF), which, turning its back on humanity, ratified this amnesty, going against all the rules of international law that establish the legal nullity of such self-amnesties.

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And where do we find ourselves at the end of this journey? At the judicial parliamentary coup d'état that was President Rousseff's impeachment, and the installation of an elitist agenda by the interim government of President Michel Temer, whose first decision was very symbolic: extinguishing the Ministry of Human Rights. If anyone had doubts about actors operating in bad faith and about the real goals of impeachment, the interim president's first days in office were extremely revealing. During Temer's administration, all the accomplishments made in the wake of the 1988 Constitution started to be rolled back. In the realms of human rights, it is difficult to find an area that has not suffered setbacks: deaths among the Black population, especially poor adolescents and youths killed by police; environmental protection; defense of the Amazon and its populations; protecting indigenous peoples; fighting against homophobia, racism and gender inequalities; labor rights; and the freezing of budgets in health, education, and other social areas, to name just a few.

Soon after, in 2018, the presidential elections put a right-wing government in power that effectively suspended the Brazilian State's human rights policy. In the political transition from dictatorship to democracy, we knew that the end of a dictatorship did not necessarily mean the beginning of democracy, that authoritarianism does not disappear in this transition, neither within the state nor within society. But we nevertheless underestimated the power of this authoritarianism in the society that re-emerged thanks to the extreme right taking executive power.

### **“DE-DEMOCRATIZING” DEMOCRACY**

As a result of the election of a right-wing administration, Brazil faces a critical moment. For more than 30 years, the state has made been advances in the rule of law and in its human rights policy, allowing an expansion of the “democratization of democracy,”<sup>3</sup> which takes into account the objective interests of the working classes. Slowly but surely the current administration has sought to annul the human rights guarantees that were secured under the 1988 Constitution, deepening the process of “de-democratization” of democracy, above all depriving the working classes of their rights and closing off their access to political participation in government decisions.

The effort to destroy the state’s human rights policies not only paints these rights as an international conspiracy, but it also fundamentally targets the economic conquests of the lower-middle and poorer classes, especially those conquests achieved during the administrations of Lula and Dilma.<sup>4</sup>

This dismantling of the promotion, defense, and effective enjoyment of human rights takes on epic proportions. The projects that are part of the conservative agenda reflect a gradual and steady effort to dismantle the rights established under the 1988 Constitution. The targets of this rollback operation are broad and diverse: attacking the rights of children and adolescents, reducing the age of criminal responsibility and lowering the age when children can enter the labor market; making the legal definition of slave labor more flexible; seeking to revoke the Disarmament Statute; creating new obstacles to the

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<sup>3</sup> The notion of “democratizing democracy” was inspired by Ignacio Ramonet’s “Democratizar a democracia,” *La Jornada*, 11 October 2005. <https://www.cartamaior.com.br/?/Editoria/Internacional/Democratizar-a-democracia/6/34949>

<sup>4</sup> Matteotti, Giacomo, “Discorso alla Camera dei Deputati,” January 31, 1921, cit. Abeltaro, Marco. *Mussolini e il fascismo*. Milan, Solferino, 2018, p.139.

demarcation of indigenous lands; modifying the Family Statute and refusing to recognize same-sex relationships; changing the laws that provide assistance to victims of sexual violence, making access to abortion even more difficult; and, above all, restricting and punishing political and social protests and violating people's privacy, under the guise of an Antiterrorism Law.

In August 2020, the Ministry of Justice put together a dossier that sought to criminalize anti-fascism. This was a cruel initiative that resurrected the military dictatorship's execrable political espionage dossiers. It was to be expected that a right-wing government would produce this dossier against anti-fascists: in Italian fascism, the opposition was eliminated through fascist laws and, above all, through the repression that befell the anti-fascist movement.<sup>5</sup> Fortunately, the Federal Supreme Court, in a historic 9-1 ruling on August 21, 2020, banned the Ministry of Justice from putting together these reports on how some citizens think and act, and prohibited their distribution.

## **BOLSONARO AND THE DESTRUCTION OF DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS**

The undisputed leader of this process of "de-democratization" of democracy is Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro. During his election campaign and throughout his administration, Bolsonaro, as well as his model President Trump in the USA, "has fed his supporters with a steady diet of aggression and racism"<sup>6</sup>. The head of state understood that euphemisms were no longer necessary when it came to attacking or humiliating women, quilombolas, Black people, indigenous people, homosexuals, Japanese descendants, or Northeasterners, finding common cause with right-wing movements.

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<sup>5</sup> In Italian fascism, thousands of people that the government considered to be anti-fascists were prosecuted by the Special State Defense Court and arrested by their political police, the Organizzazione per la Vigilanza and la Repressione dell'Antifascismo (OVRA), founded by Mussolini. Faced with such threats, thousands more were forced into exile. From February 1927 to July 1943, 15,800 people were taken to this Special Court, 12,330 were imprisoned and 160,000 were placed under special surveillance. In total, 27,735 people were incarcerated and 42 were sentenced to death. They included communists, socialists, liberal democrats, Catholics and people unaffiliated with any party (see Albeltaro, op.cit., p.88-89). ATENÇÃO ALBELTARO

<sup>6</sup> Shatz, Adam, "Why go high? Adam Shatz on America's defective democracy", *London Review of Books*, vol.45,n. 22, 19 November 2020.

Bolsonaro has repeatedly attacked the democratic foundations of the Brazilian state. After being harshly criticized for participating in a demonstration where protestors were asking for a military takeover of the country, he confessed: "People usually conspire to come to power. I already am in power. I already am the President of the Republic." Adding, later: "I am, really, the Constitution."<sup>7</sup> He presumes, in making such a statement, "that he is the law, the one who makes and breaks the law as he pleases."<sup>8</sup> Bolsonaro systematically attacks the laws that he is constitutionally tasked with defending with total impunity

For more than a year, Brazil's right-wing government has carried out its agenda of destroying the guarantees of democratic institutions. Bolsonaro inflates crises between the branches of power. He signs administrative decrees to hamper investigations involving his family. He participates in protests calling for the closure of Congress and the Federal Supreme Court. He manipulates public opinion, and even the Armed Forces, propagating the idea of unconditional support<sup>9</sup> from the military as a shield for his reckless acts. To sum up, the president has ceased to govern, in order to dedicate himself to trial runs at a coup d'état.<sup>10</sup>

As the country undergoes its current ordeal due to the lack of any policies to deal with the consequences of the pandemic, the disastrous results of Bolsonaro's denialist approach to the Coronavirus have become evident. Brazil ranks second in the world – behind the USA – in the number of deaths from Covid 19. The essence of Bolsonaro is his fatal inability to face reality, resulting in his blatant acts of irresponsibility: he says Covid-19 is a mere cold, takes the lead in protests against lockdowns, fires two of his health ministers and appoints an army general to the post who simply acts as the president's pawn, carrying out *diktats* that deny the existence of any pandemic.

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7 See "O pessoal geralmente conspira para chegar ao poder. Eu já estou no poder. Eu já sou o presidente da República", disse Bolsonaro, que, em outro momento, afirmou: "Eu sou, realmente, a Constituição". <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2020/04/democracia-e-liberdade-acima-de-tudo-diz-bolsonaro-apos-participar-de-ato-pro-golpe.shtml>

8 I use here a characterization of Trump by Butler, Judith, "Is the show finally over for Donald Trump?," *The Guardian*, 5 November 2020 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/nov/05/donald-trump-is-the-show-over-election-presidency>

9 Comissão Arns, "O presidente perdeu a condição de governar" *Folha de S Paulo*, 17May.2020 ,p.31 <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/opiniaio/2020/05/o-presidente-perdeu-a-condicao-de-governar.shtml>

10 *Idem*.

Prior to Bolsonaro, no political actor elected in the period following the 1988 Constitution set out to destroy public policies with the aim of becoming an autocrat. But Bolsonaro made himself clear during a March 17, 2020, dinner at the Brazilian embassy in Washington, D.C., when he said: “Brazil is not an open space where we seek to build things for our people. We have to deconstruct a lot. Undo a lot. To then start doing things. If I can serve at least as a turning point, I will already be very happy.”<sup>11</sup>

Bolsonaro thus dragged Brazil into the escalation of right-wing authoritarianism that is present in several countries around the world. This is not the same authoritarianism as the dictatorship of the Estado Novo or the military dictatorship of 1964. Bolsonaro shares with his fellow right-wing authoritarian leaders (Andrzej Duda in Poland, Viktor Orban in Hungary, and Trump in the United States, as well as its epigones, the Philippines and Israel) the profile of someone who is “xenophobic, homophobic, paranoid, authoritarian and contemptuous of liberal democracy. Operationally, they subvert independent institutions - the judiciary, civil service, media and academic institutions. The great prize is to hold uncontested power.”<sup>12</sup> Bolsonaro's ambition seems to be to create an autocracy: a regime in which the ruler is above the law or where the will of the ruler is the law.

## THE INCOMPLETENESS OF DEMOCRACY

Public opinion polls have shown the consolidation of support for this whole agenda, and we must also note Brazilians' high rate of satisfaction with the federal government's inaction in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic: expressive satisfaction with the President's “So what?” – corresponding to the Mussolinian *me ne frego*, I don't give a damn – because “we are all going to die one day.” The targets of this necropolitics – the large contingent of poor and those living in extreme poverty in Brazil – are the same ones who applaud this right-wing government and its emergency aid, without ever realizing that they only receive such aid thanks to Congress and its opposition parties.

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11 Alencar, Kennedy, “Bolsonaro está desconstruindo o Brasil,” 2019, <https://www.blogdokennedy.com.br/bolsonaro-esta-desconstruindo-o-brasil/>. On the same occasion, President Bolsonaro attacked the Special Commission on Political Deaths and Disappearances (CEMDP), created by a 1995 law, and replaced four of its seven members. He did so after lying about the conclusions reached by the National Truth Commission and about one of the victims disappeared in 1964, Fernando Santa Cruz, whose son Felipe Santa Cruz is the president of the OAB, Brazil's bar association.

12 Wolf, Martin, “Alarm signals of our authoritarian age,” *Financial Times*, 21 July 2020. <https://www.ft.com/content/5eb5d26d-0abe-434e-be12-5068bd6d7f06>.

The president's discourse is reflected in the practices currently in vogue on social networks that, relying on absurd arguments, conflate different problems and present unverifiable facts. He also tends to simplify reality, reducing it to specific cases around which he seeks to focus his narratives.

His right-wing administration, seeking to remain firmly in power, needs, in effect, constant ideological and propagandistic mobilization, and it needs, above all, an enemy against which the nation can close ranks. In the current phase, the enemy still seems to be diffuse: it is the left, the communists, defenders of the environment, human rights advocates, indigenous peoples, intellectuals, and university students.<sup>13</sup> The proposition is simple: patriots are those who support the head of government; leftists are not patriots and, by not being patriots, they are thus the enemies of Brazil.<sup>14</sup> Or, as formulated during his last rally when campaigning for president, on Paulista Avenue one week before the election: “Petralhada [condescending term for supporters of the Workers Party (PT)], you all going to be taken to the end of the beach [ *ponta da praia*]. You won’t have a chance in our homeland because I will cut off all your perks. [...] This will be a clean-up the likes of which has never been seen in the history of Brazil.”<sup>15</sup> In speaking about the “end of the beach,” he was referring to a naval base in Restinga de Marambaia, Rio de Janeiro state, where opponents of the military regime were allegedly tortured and executed.

How can we explain this massive support among the Brazilian population, bringing together the poorest and most needy as well as the white plutocracy around a platform that does away with the virtuous state policy of human rights, built in Brazil thanks to great effort during the more than 30 years of the 1988 Constitution? Among the many reasons, the strongest argument is that “due to its socioeconomic content, democracy absolutely did not materialize in reality and entirely, but remained formal.”<sup>16</sup> And we could see, in this

<sup>13</sup> Albeltaro, *op.cit.*, p.100

<sup>14</sup> Albeltaro, *op.cit.*, p.125

<sup>15</sup> Balloussier, Anna Virginia “Bolsonaro fez referência a área de desova de mortos pela ditadura [ *ponta da praia* ].Presidente eleito passou Natal na Restinga da Marambaia, para onde prometeu enviar 'petralhada'” *Folha de S. Paulo*, 29 December 2019  
<https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2018/12/bolsonaro-fez-referencia-a-area-de-desova-de-mortos-pela-ditadura.shtml>

<sup>16</sup> This comment by Adorno about the new right extremism may apply to the Brazilian situation now, see Adorno, Theodor. W. *Le nouvel extremisme de droite*. Paris, Climats, 2019, p. 23-24. See also Pinheiro, Paulo

sense, that the extreme right government and the wide popular support as “scars of a democracy that, to this day, has not yet lived up to its own concept”.<sup>17</sup>

As I see it, three main factors in Brazil expose the incompleteness of democracy envisioned in the 1988 Constitution – racism, economic inequality, and illegal use of force by the State – composing, as a whole, an unconstitutional state of affairs.

Brazil is a racist country, and democratic governments, during thirty years of full constitutional power and despite affirmative policies and racial quotas, have not managed to overcome the apartheid that prevails in all areas of life of the Black population. There can be no consolidated democracy when Black victims are the ones who are most often executed by Military Police in the peripheral neighborhoods of Brazil’s metropolises; when Black inmates make up the greatest number of prisoners; when Black Brazilians are barely present in the halls of power, be they the executive, legislative, or judiciary, the public prosecutors’ office, universities, senior posts in the armed forces and the police – despite being the majority, currently constituting 56% of the Brazilian population. They are permanent targets of racism in their daily lives: in comparison to white Brazilians, they have the worst jobs, receive lower salaries, and are dealt harsher sentences for the same crimes, configuring a state of affairs that, in addition to being unconstitutional, is likewise obscene and immoral.

Brazil remains one of the six most economically unequal countries in the world. Democratically elected administrations, despite having lifted millions out of extreme poverty, have not effectively managed to make Brazilian society less unequal: the richest 1% account for 28.3% of the country's total income. Brazil is only behind Qatar, where the rate is 29%. According to Oxfam, the six richest people in Brazil – Jorge Paulo Lemann (AB Inbev), Joseph Safra (Banco Safra), Marcel Hermann Telles (AB Inbev), Carlos Alberto Sicupira (AB Inbev), Eduardo Saverin (Facebook) and Ermirio de Moraes (Grupo Votorantim) – together have as much wealth as the country's poorest 100 million, that is, about half of Brazil’s population of 207.7 million.

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S., “O novo extremismo de direita,” Comissão Arns, Blog UOL, 20 October /2020. <https://comissaoarns.blogosfera.uol.com.br/2020/10/20/o-novo-extremismo-de-direita/>

<sup>17</sup> *Idem*, p.24

Ever since nation-states were created, violence against citizens has been present. Because the state is a contradictory entity that, on the one hand, concentrates the capacity to do good for the population while, on the other hand, retaining the right to use violence with which it can oppress its citizens. Universal declarations, including those that arose out of the American and French revolutions, proposed a limit to violations against citizens, defending those who needed protection. The statement that best expressed this defense was the Universal Declaration of 1948, followed by international pacts and conventions that fine-tuned this defense. The rule of law that emanates from them should not let us forget that the state is, first and foremost, an instance of domination.<sup>18</sup>

The core of public security laws that were written during the dictatorship survived the constituent assembly of 1988, contributing both to extremely high levels of police lethality and to impunity in crimes committed by state agents during the dictatorship. The military police in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo are world leaders in extrajudicial executions. No country beats Brazil. Despite efforts by several state governments and the federal administration to establish plans and reforms for public security, the extermination of the poor, especially Black adolescents and youths, continues to be a serious issue.

Countries in the Southern Cone that punished the crimes of their dictatorial pasts have been better able to resist the authoritarian outbreak than Brazil, whose Federal Supreme Court guaranteed, in 2010, continued impunity for crimes committed by the Brazilian state during its military dictatorship.

In Brazil's case, to further aggravate the fragility of a state under attack from the extreme right, coupled with the indulgence of an informal junta of 10 military cabinet ministers and a general serving as vice president, there is the persistent illusion – in addition to the incompleteness of our democracy – that the country's democratic institutions are strong, when, to the contrary, it appears that Brazil's Congress, Superior Courts, and Public Prosecutors Offices are all watching their powers be dismantled by the executive power, without putting up much of a fight. A process that is augmented by the

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**18** Rousseau, Dominique , “La peur de la mort remet aux commandes le principe de sécurité contre le principe de liberté”, *Le Monde*, 10/20/2020: “L'idée d'État de droit avait fini par faire oublier que l'Etat est d'abord une instance de domination; elle avait cru repousser loin dans les consciences la représentation de l'Etat « *monstre froid* », comme le désignait Nietzsche. La crise opère sur le mode d'un retour du refoulé: le droit n'était que l'apparence civilisée d'un Etat qui reste pure expression de la puissance.”

inability of opposition parties to organize themselves into a broad coalition against this right-wing government.

There is a tendency to affirm, in order to soothe our conscience, that in every democracy there will always be some incorrigible and crazy people, a lunatic fringe.<sup>19</sup> But it is a profound case of circular reasoning to see this statement as a source of consolation in the face of threats that erupt every day from the extreme right, both in civil society and in government. We should not underestimate the head of state or the right-wing movements due to their low intellectual or theoretical development. This would be proof of a complete lack of political vision, leading to the belief that “they are doomed to fail.” Underestimating the head of state due to his vulgar and crude expressions is a mistake, as they are part of a method that has very clear objectives.<sup>20</sup>

Those Brazilians who in good faith side with the “myth” – as Bolsonaro’s supporters like to call him, seeing him as an iconoclastic figure – will only be able to detach themselves from the extreme right if they see effective possibilities of being integrated into the economy, of having their social ties repaired, and of overcoming the illegal violence carried out by the State, the apartheid of the Black majority, and the country’s stark inequality and concentration of income.

In addition combatting them through political means, the extreme right<sup>21</sup> must be confronted on its project of authoritarian restoration. We need to build the foundation for a unified policy that promotes resistance to this right-wing government and its project to “de-democratize” democracy. If this does not happen, due to the inability of the opposition to form a unified front, the current president’s leadership will become increasingly virulent and powerful.

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<sup>19</sup> See, for example, the 13 October 2020, cover of *Istoé*, where President Bolsonaro is portrayed as the Joker from the recent movie and called “rash, irresponsible, and insane.”

<sup>20</sup> This observation on President Trump behavior may apply to the Bolsonaro case. See Devega, Chauncey “Historian Timothy Snyder on Trump's war on democracy: He is deliberately "hurting white people"; Yale historian Timothy Snyder's new book documents Trump's "sadpopulism" and America's "Road to Unfreedom", 5/9/2018; <https://www.salon.com/2018/05/09/timothy-snyder-on-trumps-campaign-against-democracy-he-is-deliberately-hurting-white-people/>

<sup>21</sup> *Albeto*, *op.cit.*, p.90

The broader community of intellectuals, university students, human rights advocates, journalists, political parties, and movements to defend those whose rights have been violated and attacked by the government has a serious responsibility to prevent the ongoing reconstruction of an authoritarian state by the current administration. We must always remember that "The way things will evolve and the responsibility for that evolution ultimately depends on us."<sup>22</sup>

More than ever, civil society's close attention to the current situation and to the interrelated actions by the entities that defend human rights is crucial. It is essential that human rights organizations remain on the alert to predict and prevent an escalation in authoritarianism and violence. We need to monitor all measures that attack civil society and seek to restrict public freedoms and weaken the rule of law. After all, the rule of law is an indicator that reveals in practice how the constitutional order works, and will help prevent rollbacks in the protection of human rights. This is a daily struggle that must emerge, because the defense of democracy, rights and freedoms must be permanent.

In the face of this offensive against our constitutional government and against our hard-won rights, we believe it is necessary to defend the requirements and the rules of democracy, and to speak up about these frankly regressive legislative bills, many of which discuss themes and areas of investigation that have been explored by our research. This dismantling of rights is a direct attack on our democratic beliefs and values. Thus, we understand that we must break the silence so that, through a public debate, we can contribute to sustaining and expanding these rights and deepening our democratic mode of coexistence.

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Note from the editors: This text reflects the opinion of the author, and does not necessarily reflect the views of the Center for the Studies of Violence (NEV/USP) or the Arns Commission (Comissão de Defesa dos Direitos Humanos "Dom Paulo Evaristo Arns"), which is a partner in this project.

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<sup>22</sup> Adorno, *op.cit*, p.70