

## **UPDATE**

**April 6, 2004**

### **Human Rights in Rio**

RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL — Every year, when Carnival is close, anti-sex work campaigns are launched throughout Brazil. Some are justifiable, such as the anti child sex work, but we all know that it opens the door for the most conservative sectors of the society to jump on our necks.

The governor of the State of Rio de Janeiro, Rosinha Matheus, together with her husband and Security Secretary (NOTE: they are both very conservative evangelists!) decided to open a new police station to "control entertainment" in Rio State. It all came after a report distributed by Reuters. The policemen of this new police department, even before they had an official staff or premises, started to visit sex work neighborhoods, asking business owners to "register for a better control". As this procedure is totally illegal and opens several opportunities for corruption, the Forum of Sex Workers of Rio decided to take some action. Besides this registration, several other abuses were noted, such as women asked to go to the police to take pictures.

In a meeting two weeks ago, the Forum (which includes all sex worker organizations and projects in Rio), requested a meeting with the State Secretary of Human Rights, Dr. Paulo Bahia. Immediately we had a positive response and a meeting scheduled. After explaining all the situation to Dr. Bahia, he agreed to take some action in favour of sex workers and nominated a person to investigate the new police department. Also, officially registered the complaints of sex workers obliged to register. Some other achievements:

- The State Secretary decided to include sex workers in the agenda of the Secretariat,
- The "new police department" was closed one week later,
- Sex workers registered against their will got official apologies from the State,
- The State Secretariat included a link to the sex workers publication *Beijo da Rua*, produced by DAVIDA, to their website,
- The Secretary agreed to co-sponsor, together with the Federal University and Sex Workers organisations a Seminar to discuss Sex Work with public authorities, academics, sex workers and sex trade people, media and the general public.

We are all very happy with these achievements in Rio and would like to share with others. For further information, please contact me.

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