

Brazilian president questions anti-slave labor law, saying it hurts businesses



Brasilia, August 2 (RHC)-- Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro has openly criticized the 2014 Constitutional Amendment which orders the expropriation of properties of those landowners whose activities occur through "work analogous to slave labor."

Bolsonaro asked: "What is slave work?" In response to his own rhetorical question, Bolsonaro claimed that this idea had been placed into the Brazilian Constitution "because, until recently, the state we were building was a totalitarian or socialist state. Through the laws, we were getting closer to socialism and communism."

The far-right president talked about this issue during an event earlier this week in which he also suggested that workplace safety standards should be modified to attract investors and expand Brazil's competitiveness.

Although Brazil abolished slavery in 1888, some agricultural businesspeople still maintain practices that harm workers, who do not receive monetary compensation of any kind. At the Amazon basin, in rural areas which can only be reached by speedboats or planes, workers are forced to remain on the farms to

pay alleged “debts” contracted by their employers. To that effect, the free mobility of rural workers is restricted as the landowners do not allow them to leave their properties.

In Brazilian law, the expression "work analogous to slave labor" is used to designate those degrading situations. Agricultural entrepreneurs who incur such practices can be sanctioned by expropriating their land without compensation. These lands should be subsequently destined to agrarian reform and popular housing programs.

From 2003 to 2018, the Labor Prosecutor's Office and the International Labor Organization (ILO) kept the Observatory of Slave Labor in Brazil, an initiative which recorded 45,028 rescues of people who were working under conditions similar to slavery.???????

Father Xavier Plassat, who is a member of the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT), an entity which denounces slavery cases, holds that modern slave labor happens usually in activities such as logging, coal production and textiles manufacturing.

While work in precarious conditions declined significantly under the leftist governments of Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff???????, Brazil has been forced to create and keep institutions to combat modern slavery.

Among them is the National Union of Tax Auditors of Trabalho (Sinait), an entity that brings together 2,200 professionals who are dedicated to verifying real working conditions. In 2017, in order to eradicate modern forms of slavery, these professionals carried out 88 monitoring operations to companies.

In Brazil, until recently, the fight against slavery was officially carried out by the Labour Ministry, an institution that Bolsonaro eliminated after he became president.???????

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