

Extending the right to food

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Minister Ananias at the inauguration of the People's Restaurant in Boa Vista

The fight against hunger requires radical action. There is no negotiating with one of the most shameful conditions ever produced by humankind. "The soul of hunger is political", once said Herbert de Souza, our Betinho, who led a strong national movement against the torment of famine and still remains our most important inspiration, beside many others, such as Josué de Castro and Dom Hélder Câmara. Betinho appropriately used to say that hunger is exclusion: "When somebody does not have anything to eat is because everything else has already been denied. It is kind of modern banishment or exile. It's like death in life."

The fight against hunger is also the fight against human misery. This demonstrates the materiality and centrality of a nutritional and food security policy in a country's social and political organisation. Still quoting Betinho, "hunger is also a certificate of absolute misery and the cry of alarm that signals the social disaster of a country". Therefore, he correctly defended that recognising food as a fundamental right and working for it shall be part of a national reconstruction project.

In Brazil, we are engaged in this work and we have been managing to eradicate hunger, with very positive consequences in our society. Along with hunger, we are fighting poverty, misery, inequality, and malnutrition. This is part of a concept that we defend with great conviction: nobody should untimely die of carelessness. When President Lula took office, since the beginning of his first term, with the fight against hunger as a top priority of his government, he was in tune with this broader commitment. Thus, a project was developed to gather and integrate government actions and programmes around the strategy named *Fome Zero* [Zero Hunger]. The Brazilian experience has achieved international recognition, for the size of its programmes



and outreach and results obtained. We demonstrate in Brazil that it is possible to guarantee access to adequate food through simple but articulated actions, in a national project, and with the status of a public policy.

The availability of food does not ensure access for all, hence the need for vigorous action by the state to correct the social and regional imbalances and ensure the right to food. This is the tone of some of our programmes, such as the Popular Restaurant, the Programme for Purchasing Food from Family Agriculture, the Programme for Construction of Cisterns to collect rainwater for human consumption and the incentive programmes for Peri-urban Agriculture, among others.

In addition, the programme *Bolsa Familia* or Family Grant is the major instrument which has managed to ensure regular and quality food supply to poor families in Brazil, through transfer of income. Some surveys conducted by the Ministry show that 93 per cent of children and 82 per cent of adults from the households benefited by the programme now have three or more meals a day. A recent opinion poll carried out in Brazil showed that the performance of the federal government in the fight against hunger and poverty has the approval of 68 per cent of the population.

The actions which we have been developing demonstrate and strengthen the role of the state in fighting hunger, a topic that has been a real taboo for many years, and was out of public policies. Now, the topic gains centrality and presents the dimension of our challenge. We are managing to eliminate hunger in our country. But we know that we still have to consolidate the rights that we are implementing and that the fight is global and it does not depend only on us. Brazil has ratified several international treaties with regard to combating hunger, but the explicit recognition of the right to food as part of the fundamental rights strengthens the institutionalisation of the National Food Security and Nutritional System and all policies in progress in the area. It is also a tool to avoid setbacks in the process that begins to take consistency in Brazil, with wide international repercussions.

"The land of men has always been a land of hunger," said Josué de Castro, while considering famine a global phenomenon that undermines entire populations, and that it is not a problem of overpopulation, but of proper public policy. The matter is under discussion in Brazil and around the world and we work with the hope that we can turn the land of hunger into the land of abundance, in a process of radical reconstruction of society. **F**