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ARTICLE 19

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Brazil: Government Promises to Adopt Right to Information Law

On 1 April 2009, at the opening session of the International Seminar on Access to Information, the Brazilian Minister of Internal Affairs, Dilma Rousseff, announced that a draft law on the right to information would be sent to Congress by the end of April. Michel Temer, President of the Chamber of Deputies, and Gilmar Mendes, President of the Supreme Court, who participated in the opening debate, also supported the idea of adopting right to information legislation.

The International Seminar on Access to Information, held in Brasilia from 1-2 April 2009, was organised by the National Forum for the Right to Access Public Information, of which ARTICLE 19 is a member. The Seminar brought together representatives of all three branches of government, civil society groups, media representatives and international experts to discuss the right to information. The right to access information held by public bodies is recognised as a fundamental human right in the Brazilian Constitution. Despite, this, more than twenty years after the Constitution was adopted, Brazil has still not passed national right to information legislation.

Toby Mendel, Senior Legal Counsel for ARTICLE 19, participated in the Seminar along with other international experts, including representatives of the Mexican Federal Institute for Access to Information (IFAI) and the Chilean Council for Transparency. Mendel's comments focused on global trends on the right to information and key principles for right to information legislation. The Seminar also included a panel of Congressman and leaders of political parties to start a debate on the content of the law.

ARTICLE 19 and ANDI (an ARTICLE 19 partner working on media and children's rights) used the seminar to launch an online publication on using access to information as a tool to monitor public policies. The publication builds on discussions at a seminar organised by the two organisations in 2007.

ARTICLE 19 very much welcomes the Brazilian government's commitment to adopt right to information legislation, something which is long overdue. We urge the authorities to deliver on these promises by adopting progressive right to information legislation, after a broad consultative process involving the public and civil society.

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- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.