National Network for Democracy in Brazil founded in New York City

Two hundred activists and academics meet on Saturday, December 1, 2018 at the Columbia Law School to form the National Network for Democracy in Brazil. According to James N. Green, professor of Brazilian history at Brown University and organizer of the event, “After a long day of discussions, we decided to form a decentralized, democratic and nonpartisan national network with three objectives: (1) Educate the U.S. public about the current situation in Brazil; (2) Defend progressive social, economic, political, and cultural advances in Brazil; (3) Support social movements, community organizations, NGOs, universities, and activists, etc., who will be vulnerable in this new political climate.”

The meeting opened with the participation of Debora Diniz, anthropologist at the University of Brasilia (UnB), a researcher at Anis-Institute of Bioethics and an important defender of human rights; Gladys Mitchell-Walthour, political scientist, specialist on race in Brazil and president of the Brazilian Studies Association (BRASA); Sidney Chalhoub, professor of Brazilian history at Harvard University; and Alex Main, Director of International Policy at the Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR) in Washington, DC. Throughout the day, participants gathered in small groups and plenary sessions to discuss the different challenges to democracy as a result of Bolsonaro’s election.

During the afternoon session, participants attended different working groups to outline priorities and develop concrete strategies in addressing specific issues, recognizing the intersectionality of many of the themes being discussed. They included: academic freedom; Afro-descendants/Blacks; economics; indigenous peoples; labor and workers; land and rural workers; law and lawfare; LGBTQI+; Lula Livre; media; religion; public health and universal access; public security and safety; socio-environmental issues; urban movements; working with Congress; and women.

Among the activities approved at the final assembly were: support for the national petition campaign initiated by the BRASA Executive Committee in defense of human rights and academic freedom in Brazil; organizing a national day of public demonstrations in memory of Marielle Franco on March 14; and the formation of an International Observatory for Democracy in Brazil, which will be headquartered at Brown University. The Observatory will monitor the political situation in Brazil and disseminate information about increased attacks on human, social, and economic rights, as well as on the environment. In addition, the assembly approved an idea to seek resources to establish a Brazil Office in Washington, DC, which would work with Congress, trade unions, non-governmental organizations, regional universities, and the International Observatory to further the goals of the Network.

“There is a growing interest in Brazil in this country, especially since the election of far-right candidate Jair Bolsonaro, who some call the 'Trump of the Tropics.' We want to inform the American people about this new political situation and defend the progressive advances that have been achieved in the last thirty years,” explained Green. "Our plan is to encourage the formation of 100 committees across the United States. We currently have contacts in 265 colleges and universities in 45 states. We hope to organize that interest into a national movement."
Two Brazilian political leaders, who were in New York at the time, attended the event: Raul Amorim, a member of the national leadership of the Landless Workers Movement (MST) and Fernando Haddad, of the Workers’ Party and the left-wing presidential challenger to Bolsonaro in the second round of the 2018 elections. Both commended the assembly’s efforts and pointed out the importance of international activities to defend democracy in Brazil.

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