

Citizen's Report

Youth and Human Rights¹

São Paulo: Capão Redondo, Heliópolis, Jardim Ângela and Jardim Jacira

The **Human Rights Observatory** was created as a pilot project in São Paulo funded by the Human Rights State Secretariat, the ministry of justice and the UNDP in the year 2000. The Center for the Study of Violence at the University of São Paulo coordinated and implemented this project in partnership with the Instituto Sou da Paz.

Four groups of youths from the periphery of São Paulo chose a right from the Declaration of Human Rights that they and their peers considered most vital and problematic in their respective communities, and they conducted research locally about the status of this right in their communities. The groups developed diverse tactics to collect information, and held meetings and conducted interviews with assistance from local monitors. Throughout the project, the groups and the monitors registered and organized the information into reports, which were later consolidated into the **Citizen's Report**.

The **Citizen's Report** compiled the texts and research of the collective work of all these groups: the youth, the monitors and the members of the Executive Group. The creation of this Report was an attempt to organize a series of points of view and voices regarding the status of human rights.

The first part of the Report focuses on the impressions of and the information gathered by the youth groups, and it is based on their writings. Throughout the project, each group collected and analyzed information and also described the work process. The Report also includes profiles of the observers, summaries of the socio-economic situation of the communities, and comments from specialists, who met with the youths during the production of the text, regarding the themes of the project. The second part describes and analyzes the development and the methodology of the project.

The pilot project of São Paulo is the first step in the creation of a network of Human Rights Observatories. The Report was created with the intention to expand the debate on the deprivation of human rights, a reality many Brazilians face, and to discover methods to overcome the violations.

¹ Extracted and Edited by Marcelo Daher from Observatórios de Direitos Humanos. *Relatório de Cidadania I: Os Jovens e os Direitos Humanos*. São Paulo: NEV/USP, 2000. Translation by Beatriz Arantes.

Main Findings

Violence and Right to Security

The **Arco** group researched homicides resulting from interpersonal conflicts and vigilantes. Official reports tend to attribute the homicides and massacres to conflicts between drug traffickers or other conflicts between groups of organized crime, and this research provided a more complex diagnosis of the problem. The research shows that the need for greater public safety depends upon increased access to justice, such as in participatory conflict resolution, and not in increased police involvement, of which the members of the community are wary. The Report has also shed more light on the problem of domestic violence, gender in general, and the need for victim and witness protection.

Right to Education

The **UNAS** group (*União de Associações de Moradores de Heliópolis*) provided information on the challenges related to education, a vital commodity in the community. The schools needed to provide knowledge, cultural activities and to improve the employment prospects for the youth of the community. Rather than provide these services, the public schools become yet another location of human rights violations. While one principal meets with the students and their parents at home, several of the principals use the police to handle students. Schools within the same neighborhood vary greatly because the principals make decisions singularly. This autonomy might allow for good local practices, but it can also result in the lack of uniformity in educational policies related to the interaction between community and school. The youths suggest a greater integration of the school with the community, through increased decision-making from parents, students and community leaders, and suggest that the school be open to community leisure and cultural activities.

Right to Leisure and Culture

The research from the group **Chico Mendes** revealed a deficiency of public cultural equipment for the youth of the community. The youth see access to culture not just as a means of reducing violence, but also as a form of self-expression, and the expression of their community's inclusion or exclusion in society. Community members have demonstrated that they are disposed to volunteer and share their experience and talents despite material difficulties. Public services and civil society organizations could play an important role in enriching the possible forms of expression of the community.

Right to Employment

The **Jardim Jacira** group's findings revealed the human face of the difficulty the youth encounter in obtaining employment, especially in their first job. Unemployment is highest amongst the inhabitants, especially youth, of the neighborhoods in the periphery. The youth experience great pressure from their families for economic and social stability. Despite hope for greater acquisitive power and personal growth, the youth see the limit to their access to employment, exacerbated by the changes caused by technological advances of the last decade. The research revealed the perverse character of the job market: disillusion, fragility, financial troubles, and discrimination from employers, low salaries, precarious work conditions and violations of worker's rights. The research also highlighted the inadequacy of support services for the unemployed and the lack of programs to qualify the youth for the job market.