



For immediate release – 25 June 2010

PRESS RELEASE

Brazil: Access to Information Bill Passed by Senate Commission

On 16 June, the access to information bill was passed by a Senate commission, one step closer to the full adoption of a freedom of information law. The bill is expected to pass through two other commissions before being enacted by the President. ARTICLE 19 welcomes the approval and urges that the upcoming electoral process does not hinder further legislative work.

The access to information bill was sent by the executive to the lower house in May 2009, where it received input from representatives and civil society, including ARTICLE 19, which played a crucial role in the process. The house passed the bill unanimously on 13 April 2010, and the legislation is now being reviewed by the Senate. The Commission of Constitution, Justice and Citizenship was the first of three commissions in the Senate to pass the bill.

The bill has provisions in line with international standards, but it still has some shortcomings. A key problem is that it fails to provide for the establishment of an independent body to consider appeals against refusals to provide access to information. The experience of other countries demonstrates that such a body is essential to the success of an access to information law.

This year the legislative agenda is shorter than usual because Brazil is holding general elections. The electoral campaigns start in July and legislative quorum is expected to be hard to achieve after this. ARTICLE 19 welcomes the approval of the bill by the commission and recommends that senators concentrate efforts to enact a right to information law in 2010.

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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.