

## **Human rights and electoral passions**

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**There is some continuity in this area, and some from 1988; the partisan manifestations do not contribute to Brazilian democracy.**

We are on the eve of general elections in Brazil. This is a major solemn moment in every democracy. It is the moment when the people express their wish. It is the moment when the social contract between the nation and the State, between civil society and its government leaders – the contract that is inscribed and provided for in the country's Constitution – is reaffirmed, when the political parties present their proposals, and the politicians who will rule the country in the next four years are elected. In a democracy such as the one we are building in Brazil, it is a moment of choice, but it is also a moment of tranquility because the choices are not dramatic, they do not imply the country's salvation or doom, but express legitimate conflicts and growing consensus.

With these thoughts in mind, I have read in "*Política de Direitos Humanos*" [Human Rights Policy], an excellent book organized by Rossana Rocha Reis, a young teacher of political science at the University of São Paulo, two lectures given by two public figures of the highest quality, José Gregori, the first secretary of the Brazilian Human Rights Secretariat, created in 1997, and Paulo Vannuchi, current incumbent of this ministerial-level secretariat. Both are dear friends to me: Gregori was my contemporary in Law School, and my lifelong political companion; Vannuchi was my doctoral student in political science at the University of São Paulo – a student of strong convictions who is a member of the PT [Workers' Party] since its foundation.

Both lectures give us a picture of the fight for human rights in Brazil, but what struck me most was how they complete each other, how the first one's work was continued by the other, how the fight for human rights is not a conflicting parties issue, but concerns a society that is united in the fight against torture and police violence, against racism

and anti-Semitism, against child prostitution, against the exploitation of children and adolescents, against violence towards women and homosexuals. Vannuchi was the first one to speak. And his speech acknowledged a construction and a continuity: "Progress has been made towards the consolidation of rights, which is particularly clear from 1988 on... There were significant advances in the FHC administration". Gregori, for its part, besides corresponding to the esteem expressed by Vannuchi, remarked: "Our political positions, as everyone knows, do not coincide, but our essence from the standpoint of the role of Human Rights in Brazil is practically coincident".

This is not the only area where continuity exists. In numerous sectors it dates from the time of the democratic transition. A continuity that responds to the 1988 Constitution. This is why, in these elections, I cannot refrain from watching in perplexity, on one hand, the assumption that everything began with the Lula administration, that there was never, ever, a government such as this, and, on the other hand, the rebirth of a liberal-authoritarian "udenismo" [from an old right-wing Brazilian political party] according to which the present government disrespects the Constitution, and that the Rousseff candidacy is a threat to Brazilian democracy. These kind of partisan and passionate manifestations, with no basis in fact, do not honor those who do it. They do not contribute to Brazilian democracy.