

Women with HIV Defend their Right to Bear Children

By Mario Osava

Sumaia dos Santos Dias was railroaded into having a litigation after giving birth to her third child at the age of 24, because she tested positive for HIV, the AIDS virus.

Today she is working to defend the reproductive rights of other pregnant women living with HIV in Brazil.

Boa Vista, where Dias lives, is in the

extreme northern part of the country's Amazon jungle region, far from large cities like Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo.

Dias, whose child was not infected by HIV, said she was pressured by her doctor to have the litigation, on the argument that she would "endanger the life of an innocent child," or leave her children orphans. Her husband had infected her with HIV and died shortly

after the birth of their third child.

Six years later, she takes six antiretroviral pills a day—the drugs that delay the onset of full-blown AIDS—and remains in good health while raising her children on her salary as an employee in the state government.

Wanting her experience to be of use to others, Dias joined the Network of Positive Citizens, an organisation of women living with HIV. The Brazilian Health Ministry has a Sexually Transmitted Diseases and AIDS (CETSS) programme that train members of the network to take part in prevention efforts.

CETSS defends the right of HIV-positive women to have children.

"It is not up to a health professional to decide whether or not these women can have children. It is their job to offer them all the information so they can decide for themselves," said Katia Souto, in charge of gender issues in CETSS.

The Health Ministry provides medicines free of

charge to all HIV/AIDS patients, including pregnant women, who by following a strict treatment plan reduce the risk of passing HIV on to their unborn children by nearly 90 percent.

When only the male partner in a heterosexual couple is infected, in vitro fertilisation procedures now allow a woman to have children with no risk of contagion.

Source: Inter Press Service, 26 December 2002

WOMEN SOLD LIKE... FROM P. 4

"Yugoslavia has signed an agreement with the EU-sponsored Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe in order to fight organised crime in this area," assistant federal Interior Minister Brankica Grupkovic told journalists in Belgrade recently.

"Besides increased cooperation of police in prevention of human trafficking in the area, we will be obliged to introduce modern laws that provide up to eight years imprisonment for human trafficking," she said. "Maybe this could be a good start that would lead to the solution to the problem."

Source: Inter Press Service, 26 December 2002

