

Brazil to Use Drones to Fight Slave Labor



Brasilia, July 29 (teleSUR-RHC)-- The Brazilian government will start using drones to monitor and investigate slave labor in rural areas in the country, a Labor Ministry official said on Tuesday. "Drones don't substitute the inspector's physical presence, but they will be useful out in the country, in the case of farms that are hard to reach by road, for example," Bruno Barcia Lopes, coordinator of Rural Supervision at Rio de Janeiro's Labor Secretariat, told Reuters.

Starting next month, inspectors who investigate companies that hire slave labor will start using six drones equipped with high-resolution cameras to shoot videos and take photos of construction sites in the state of Rio de Janeiro. It will then roll out in other states around the country.

This comes in a time when the government is trying to fight off attempts by companies to undermine its crackdown on slave labor.

In December, a Supreme Court judge suspended the publication of a so called "Dirt List" of companies which are being investigated for the use of slave labor in the country.

Supreme Court Justice Ricardo Lewandowski ordered the Labor Ministry to suspend the release of the blacklist. His decision was a response to an injunction filed by Brazil's Real Estate Developers' Association (Abrainc), whose members include the country's largest construction companies. The list of

about 600 employers is updated every six months. If after two years a company pays all its fines and proves that it has corrected working conditions, it is removed from the list.

The list serves to punish the suspected companies with financial fines and boycotts from both the public and the private sectors. Such companies are blocked from receiving government loans and have restrictions on their sales and business. Also, as part of the 2005 National Slave Eradication pact, more than 400 companies and banks pledged not to do business or provide loans to the suspected companies.

Since the court's decision against the list, the government has been working on relaunching the publication of the list as they attempt to use the Brazilian Freedom of Information law.

Brazil defines slave labor as work carried out in degrading conditions or in conditions that pose a risk to the worker's life. Forced labor, and working to pay off debts incurred with the employer, are also considered slave labor.

According to data revealed by the Labor Ministry in May, Brazilian officials have rescued over 50,000 people from working in slavery since 1995, with 10,000 of those between 2011 and 2015 alone. The report was released as Brazil marked the 127th anniversary of abolishing slavery.

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