



**ASBH**  
American Society for  
Bioethics and Humanities

4700 W. Lake Avenue, Glenview, Illinois, U.S., 60025

March 31, 2003

Dr. Guy de Capeville  
Chancellor  
The Catholic University of Brasilia

Dear Sir:

As the principal academic and professional organization for bioethics in the United States, the American Society for Bioethics and Humanities wishes to express its concern regarding the dismissal of Professor Debora Diniz from the Catholic University of Brasilia.

As we understand the matter, Professor Diniz was invited by a ministry of the Brazilian government to participate in a public discussion of abortion as it exists in your country. Her sociological research into the prevalence of the practice--regardless of its legality or its religious or social acceptance --apparently provoked hostility and mounting pressure for her dismissal. The university, unfortunately, yielded to that pressure.

To be reliable, even to exist at all, scholarship requires institutional nurturance and protection. It cannot be conducted in a climate of fear. Your institution has as its mission, the "geração e comunhão do saber, comprometida com a qualidade e os valores éticos e cristãos, na busca da verdade." A communion of knowledge, as you recognize, requires inquiry into the truth. To inquire freely into the ethics of abortion, good information is essential; indeed, an anti-abortion stance might reasonably find Professor Diniz's data invaluable. In any case, international standards of accountability in institutions of higher learning and respect for academic freedom call for a more ethical treatment of scholars than by all accounts Professor Diniz has received.

While respecting every institution's right to hold positions on questions of public policy, the American Society for Bioethics and Humanities regrets the Catholic University of Brasilia's abrogation of academic freedom in Professor Diniz's case. We urge you to reconsider that decision.

We will soon post this letter on our Web site. We would be pleased to post your response.

Yours very truly,

John Lantos, MD  
President

c: Dr. Ivan Rocha Neto, Graduate Coordinator  
Dr. Tania Maria Rossi, Head, Department of Psychology  
ANIS: Institute of Bioethics, Human Rights and Gender

