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Science is a lighthouse – 07/06/2022 – Conrado Hübner Mendes

This column was produced especially for the campaign #science in the elections." This July, for the second year, columnists give up their space to address topics related to the scientific process, in texts written by guests or by themselves.

This space was provided by columnist Conrado Hübner Mendes, to professors Soraya Smaili (Unifesp) and Debora Foguel (UFRJ). They are researchers at the Society, University and Science Studies Center (Sou_Ciência).

On June 26th, Gilberto Gil turned 80 and we were the ones who received a gift, his article "Brilliance of science and culture will take us out of the darkness". Gil defends that scientists and artists share common practices: they explore the unknown, scrutinize the mysteries of the universe and the soul, imagine different worlds and possible futures. Science and culture help us to see and rediscover our humanity, necessary ingredients to design a new country project.

It is in universities that the creative energies of science, art and culture meet and mix in a diverse and plural environment, generator of ideas, forces and lives. It is these institutions that insist on persisting and resisting these dark times and their knights of the apocalypse who preach neglect, dismantling, dismantling.

In 2022, after three years of heavy losses, many federal universities have already announced that they will not have the resources to leave their doors open until the end of the year and the classrooms occupied in person, as well as keep the laboratories and research groups, the hospitals that serve the sick population through the Unified Health System and the extension projects that take the university beyond the walls.

This announcement is startling in view of the hundreds of actions that federal universities, but not only them, have encouraged in the last two years. According to a survey by Centro Sou_Ciência (Society, University and Science), in partnership with Andifes (National Association of Directors of Federal Institutions of Higher Education), so far, of the 40 mapped universities, more than a thousand actions have been cataloged, in more than 500 municipalities, covering health care; research, technology and innovation; extension and solidarity; communication and organizational activities of the institution itself or of support to city halls, states or even at the national level.

During Science Month, Sou_Ciência, in partnership with Instituto Serrapilheira, launches a panel that highlights the collapse of funding and deterioration of the structures of these same federal universities and research institutes.

Despite the short money, it is indeed impressive to become aware of the wealth of actions that universities have promoted during the pandemic, spreading their initiatives through the voids of the country, knocking on the door of the invisible and providing reliable information in favor of life over two years of work, of solutions based on scientific evidence and need. This solidary effort and support, added to that of health professionals and the SUS, were recognized by Brazilian society, but not by the federal government.

In another survey carried out by Sou_Ciência, in partnership with the Idea Big Data Institute, it was found that, today, people have become more interested in science and health, trust scientists and doctors as a priority, and are already able to cite the name of scientists or Brazilian research institution. A movement that is reflected in the high percentage of Brazilians who believe in the vaccine and who are vaccinated and alive.

Not all lights were turned off. The many that remain, fortunately most, serve as a beacon to guide us back on the path of development and towards a new Brazil, where education, science and culture are priorities.

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