

EX TROPICIS



ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS

Spot News

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ENVIRONMENT

Brazil's Environment Secretary dismissed

José Lutzenberger, now the former Secretary of the Environment, made some feisty statements recently during Prepcom, the fourth UNCED preparatory meeting on in New York until early April. These comments did not go over well in Brasília and top federal government officials met at dawn last Saturday morning to decide if they were going to replace the outspoken environmentalist. When he was asked to resign early Saturday morning, Lutzenberger refused. He was relieved of his duties the same day.

At Prepcom, Lutzenberger said that if developed countries sent large-scale funding to Brazil for environment projects, they would run the risk of having their money fall into corrupt hands. He singled out the Brazilian Institute of the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources (Ibama) as a case in point.

This was not the first time Ibama had been reprimanded for internal corruption and, in the former Secretary's own words, "acting more like a partner in logging companies" rather than a conservation agency. Ibama has been accused of giving out blank logging permits to timber firms so they can decide on the species of trees, how much they will cut down and also choose the region. Lutzenberger insisted that he had not specifically criticized Ibama. Never one to mince words, he said that he had simply mentioned that many government agencies were corrupt. "But," he stated in an interview, "it was Ibama that got upset. If the shoe fits, wear it."

Lutzenberger later said it was a relief to lose his job. He pointed out that he can now devote more time to his own environmental consultancy firm and the London-based Gaia Foundation, that funds sustainable projects all over the developing world.

Goldemberg takes over as Secretary and leaves for Prepcom

Education Minister José Goldemberg has been appointed interim Environment Secretary and will hold this post until UNCED is over. He planned to leave for New York March 28 to convince the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank to give

Brazil US\$ 430 million for environment projects that have already been approved by the two banks.

Goldemberg also plans to obtain the first portion, US\$ 250 million, of total G 7 nation financing of US\$ 1.5 billion allocated to tropical forest conservation. He has yet to receive the Minister of Economy's approval of the contribution of US\$ 200 million, Brazil's share of the financing for this project.

The new Secretary of the Environment intends to investigate corruption in the Ibama administration. He stated last week that he will appoint enquiry commissions to study the many claims of fraud and misuse of funds within Ibama.

Ibama changes presidents in midstream

Last week, the president of Ibama, Eduardo Martins was dismissed due to corruption charges and Maria Padua was appointed in his place. She vowed last week to, "eliminate the cancer" in the institute and cooperate more with non-governmental agencies (NGOs).

UNCED

Congresswoman denounces misuse of funds

Regina Gordilho, an independent federal congresswoman, last week stated that the National Work Group (GTN) which is responsible for overseeing the construction of UNCED - or Earth Summit - sites among other tasks, is mishandling funds. She declared that the budget of some US\$ 41 million was being shared by a group of "old boy" friends.

The coordinator of the group, Luiz Themudo, resigned in embarrassment the following day. The tender for the construction of some US\$ 20 million worth of buildings had gone to a virtually unknown company registered in the tax haven of Panama and possessing less than US\$ 1 million in capital.

This tender, among others, was awarded to friends of Themudo's. It is not yet known if fraud charges will be brought about.

DIAMONDS

Methane gas is a piston's best friend

Produced from sewage or garbage, methane gas is now being transformed into artificial diamonds by the National Space Research Institute (Inpe) in Sao José dos Campos in the state of Sao Paulo. As diamonds are the hardest material known to man, the automobile, aerospace and computer industries are eagerly awaiting the diamonds.

By the year 2000, some US\$ 4 billion will be spent on manufacturing the artificial stone. The diamond is ideal for re-vesting pistons and other parts for motors. A physicist from the institute stated that once industry starts using the methane diamond, it will not be necessary to use lubricating oil anymore. A motor's working life will also be extended.

RECYCLING

Major companies decide to get involved

Fifteen companies announced last Friday in Rio de Janeiro the founding of the non-profit organization, Industrial Commitment to Recycling (Cempre) to promote recycling in the country. This is the first time that the Brazilian business community has gotten behind recycling, an extremely difficult practise to follow in the country due to the lack of accessible facilities.

Coca Cola, Proctor & Gamble and Souza Cruz are some of the companies that are taking part. These 15 groups will invest US\$ 500,000 annually in environmental awareness programs. The project was suggested by Coca Cola who carries out similar projects in Japan, Canada, Europe and the U.S. This company already invests US\$ 1.3 million worldwide in environmental education and recycling programs.

Brazil produces some 90,000 tons of trash daily according to 1991 figures from the National Statistics Bureau. Only 73% of this garbage is collected. Approximately 86% of this is left in open garbage dumps, 2% is disposed of in rivers, swamps and lakes and less than 1% is recycled.

SPACE RESEARCH

Canadian satellite to survey the Amazon

From April 12 to 19, a huge satellite from the Canadian Space Agency will fly over five areas in the Amazon to determine which metals lie under the earth's surface. The Canadian mission will fly over Carajás, Tucuruí and Tapajos in the Pará state and the town of Sena Madureira and the Chico Mendes Extractive Reserve in the state of Acre. The Canadian government is footing the bill of US\$ 2 million. The equipment can detect deposits of bauxite, copper, iron, manganese, nickel and other metals.