

EX TROPICIS



ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS

Spot News

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ENVIRONMENT

South American countries propose environmental solidarity

February 20, at Canela in the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul, the presidents of Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay, Argentina and the chancellor of Chile released a significant document that stresses cooperation to resolve environmental issues. The document is part of the countries' preparation for UNCED 92 in Rio de Janeiro in June.

The document's first proposal is to allocate financial resources currently used to maintain protectionist trade policies to projects whose policies are more compatible with sustained development. The other nine items deal with: protection of the atmosphere, biological diversity, soil degradation and desertification, forests, water resources, the marine environment, toxic waste, land reform and, finally, institutional reform.

During the meeting that led up to the signing of the document, the five countries did not criticize other nations' environmental policies. This was a victory for Argentina, Chile and Uruguay, who, since the beginning of the meeting, had wanted to avoid confrontation with developed countries.

President Fernando Collor said that the document was historic in that the main issue it deals with is environmental protection linked with human rights. He commented that there is no point in discussing environmental solutions without addressing social problems.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Brazilian-made software to prevent oil spills

Software developed by the engineering department at the Rio de Janeiro Federal University will be able to help avoid oil spills at sea. A spokesman from the department explained that the new system, "evaluates the structure of hulls through analysis of data on structural dynamics." Sensors used in the software measure stress resistance to determine whether the vessel is seaworthy and can cope with the most adverse weather conditions.

GOVERNMENT CORRUPTION

Do the right thing

Eduardo Martins, the president of the Brazilian Institute of Renewable Natural Resources (Ibama), is threatening to resign in protest of widespread corruption

in the country's forest management. He stated last week that he would quit if he could not put an end to illegal logging in the Amazon and if his forest warden moralization program is not effective.

According to Martins, 80% of timber-harvesting permits are forged. He added that the timber business in the Amazon brings more misery than benefits to the region's population. The Ibama president has already ordered an audit of all permits issued in the Amazon.

MERCURY

A recurrence of the Minimata tragedy in the Amazon?

Last week in Belem, Pará, at the 28th Congress of the Brazilian Society of Tropical Medicine, a Japanese doctor and professor at the University of Kumamoto, Masazumi Harada, voiced the opinion that the Amazon could become a tragic repeat performance of the Minimata disaster in Japan.

Dr. Harada was responsible for caring for the people contaminated by some 600 tons of mercury that was dumped into Minimata Bay.

The Japanese victims were contaminated when they ate fish from the bay. A Brazilian doctor who participated in the Congress said that he had been treating Amazon region inhabitants for mercury poisoning through fish consumption for several years. He confirmed that in a riverside community near Santarém in the state of Amazonas, a sampling of 20 people all had higher mercury levels in their bodies than the World Health Association permits. Santarém is over 1,000 kilometers away from the nearest illegal gold mining operations that use mercury to purify gold.

Dr. Harada is still caring for victims of the Minimata mercury contamination to this day. Over 40 people died and many others had children with congenital defects. Some Minimata residents only began to experience medical problems resulting from the contaminated fish 20 years later.

Center attempting gold purification without mercury

In Rio de Janeiro, the Mining Technology Center (Cetem) is trying to do away with the use of mercury in gold mining. An experiment that used harmless bacteria to purify gold proved successful at Cetem and was recently put into practice at a gold mine in Nova Lima in the Minas Gerais state.

MEDIA

Major international TV networks ready to cover UNCED 92

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development will be accessible to viewers all over the world. The international editor of CNN was in Rio de Janeiro recently to finalize details of bringing 160 staff members to cover the conference and parallel events. NHK's Hajime Ota has said that the network plans to have 25 journalists in Rio for UNCED. NHK is the only public television network in Japan and it boasts the highest viewer ratings. The German network, ZFD, will be sending about 20 journalists.

CNN is now launching "Captain Planet", the hero of an adventure series that will focus on UNCED. In the episode called "Captain Planet and the Planetears", the young hero will stop a gang of eco-villains from sabotaging the conference by kidnapping the heads of state and replacing them with pseudo-delegates who will cooperate with their evil plans for the world. This is not the only conflict afoot. UNCED organizers are trying to add three more satellite channels to make a total of six for the conference coverage. They are running into stiff competition from Seville's Expo-92 World's Fair; this fair is taking place at the same time and Spain beat Brazil to available satellites.

ENTERTAINMENT

Celebrities to perform at UNCED

The Spanish tenor Plácido Domingo has confirmed his participation at the "Concert for Life" on June 7 at "Forte Copacabana", a fort in a park in Rio de Janeiro. The Brazilian composer Tom Jobim and British singer-songwriter Peter Gabriel have also agreed to take part in the event. Yet to confirm their presence are Robert Redford, Tina Turner, Kevin Costner and Sean Connery. The concert will be broadcast live to some 1.5 million television viewers.