

EX TROPICIS



ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS

Spot News

March 26 to 31, 1992

UNITED NATIONS

Brazilian woman to receive Global 500 prize

Anésia Schmidt, 84, will be awarded the UN's top honor, the Global 500, awarded for outstanding achievement in the area of environmental protection. Unep, the environment agency of the UN that is headquartered in Kenya, gives the prize to 500 people annually.

Mrs. Schmidt was shocked to learn of the award. Her husband, Wolfgang, had submitted their conservation project for tree species native to Brazil. He had, however, not told his wife. Mr. Schmidt wanted the prize, if she were selected, to be a surprise for their wedding anniversary. Mr. Schmidt, 86, came to Brazil from Germany and became a Brazilian citizen. The couple has been working on their tree conservation project since 1942. They have devoted 50 years to acclimatizing and cultivating native species in nurseries on their farm in the interior of the Sao Paulo state. The Schmidt couple has planted over 12,000 trees of 118 different species and donated thousands of seedlings. Without their dedication, many species would have died out.

The three other Brazilians who received the Global 500 prize in the past were Chico Mendes, the Acre state rubber tapper union leader and environmentalist murdered in 1988, Fábio Feldmann, a federal congressman from the state of Sao Paulo and a Rio de Janeiro state deputy, Carlos Minc.

AMAZON DEFORESTATION

Is less bad news good news?

On March 27, the National Space Research Institute (Inpe) in the state of Sao Paulo issued a report that stated that in 1991, there was 20% less Brazilian Amazon deforestation than in 1990. This report claims that in 1990, 13,800 square kilometers were cut down. In 1991, this figure dropped to 11,100 square kilometers. Edson Machado, the Secretary of Science and Technology commented, "this is a favorable report and it will make things easier for us during the Earth Summit (UNCED) when other countries start criticizing us."

The criticism that will take place during UNCED is not unwarranted. The Amazon forest covers 3.9 million square kilometers; 4.9 square kilometers lie within Brazil's borders.



The area deforested in 1991 corresponds to .3% of the total Amazon forest. The report also mentioned that there were more slash and burn fires sighted last year, especially in the central-western region of the country. The director of Inpe insisted that this does not necessarily mean that more forest is being burned down.

Mr. Machado believes two factors are responsible for lower deforestation figures in Brazil. He said that the federal government has stepped up conservation enforcement and that tax breaks formerly offered to land speculators have been discontinued.

UNCED

Prepcom IV still bogged down

Only a few days from the closing ceremonies, the fourth preparatory meeting for UNCED, being held in New York, is still at an impasse on the CO₂ emission issue and Agenda 21. The Convention on Climactic Changes, an agreement to limit toxic gas emissions, mainly of CO₂ and CFCs, has not been signed yet.

CFCs, used in styrofoam packaging, spray cans and fiberfill for furniture, destroys the ozone layer. Developed countries have agreed to phase out CFCs by 1995 and developing nations have 2010 as a deadline.

The CO₂ issue remains controversial. The U.S. government has refused to admit that there is conclusive evidence that CO₂ emissions contribute to the greenhouse effect. Scientists at the conference are hotly contesting this stand. The U.S. responded to their country's classification as the planet's leading CO₂ polluter by saying that it could not be proven that the greenhouse effect was not being caused by "acts of God" such as volcanic eruptions.

The U.S. delegation's position is more probably based on economic rather than scientific factors. Reducing CO₂ emissions would cost money because the U.S. could not keep on using cheap fuel sources like coal and petroleum. The Bush administration's priority is being re-elected. Mr. Bush is wary of taking a stand on pollution reduction and losing taxpayers' votes.

Talks on Agenda 21, the economic "greenprint" for the 21st century that would guarantee growth based on sustainable development, are also deadlocked. Not all the developed nations have agreed to contribute financial resources to developing countries to ensure that the latter will not resort to destructive practises with respect to environmental sustainability.



Corruption within Earth Summit organizing committee

The Federal Audit Court (TCU), responsible for investigating fraud and misuse of funds within government bodies, is now looking into all contracts awarded by the National Work Group (GTN) that is organizing UNCED. These investigations are a result of the dismissal of Luiz Themudo, the GTN coordinator two weeks ago.

The TCU has requested copies of the contracts, worth a total of US\$ 41 million. The GTN did not take the trouble to hold open tenders and allegedly awarded contracts unfairly. Since last July, government officials and other people have been accusing the GTN of corruption. The federal government has left it until now to take action.

ENVIRONMENT

TCU will carry out audit of Ibama

The Brazilian Institute of the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources (Ibama), making national headlines for corruption rather than conservation, will also undergo an audit by the TCU. A government spokesman stated last week that the conclusions of the extensive operational audit would be made public before the opening of UNCED in June.

Ibama superintendent in Espírito Santo state fired

Maria Padua, the newly-appointed president of Ibama, last week dismissed three Ibama employees. Carlos Santos, Espírito Santo's Ibama superintendent, was perhaps the most infamous. Reasons given for his fall from grace involve corruption and fraud. Besides employing a wide range of relatives in his staff and taking fish and seafood that Ibama had confiscated home for dinner, Santos allegedly took bribe money to approve mining projects in protected areas.

Espírito Santo has a poor environmental record. Brazilian timber companies and multinationals from countries such as Britain control large-scale logging operations. They have contributed to the devastation of the state's few remaining forests. Desertification has been the main result of these activities.