

# EX TROPICIS



ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS

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## ENVIRONMENT

### **United States believes in democratic right to pollute**

Last week, during international negotiations held in preparation for the final pre-UNCED meeting in New York in March, the U.N. tried in vain to convince the U.S. to reduce its CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, one of the causes of the greenhouse effect. The U.S. refused to budge, stating that each country has the right to control its own pollution. The U.N. has the formidable task of mediating the negotiations of the 130 countries that will take part in the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED 92), in Rio de Janeiro in the month of June.

## AMAZON

### **Seminar in Pará state offers numerous solutions**

From February 17 to 21, Pará's capital of Belém hosted the 1st International Seminar on Environment, Poverty and Development in the Amazon (Sindamazônia). Some 2,500 people from 17 countries discussed scientific information and solutions to ecological, social and economic problems in the Amazon region.

Conclusions drawn from the seminar debates will be submitted to the UNCED preparatory meeting to be held in New York. The Governor of Pará commented that Sindamazônia participants, "said no to colonialism, especially environmental colonialism." The seminar dealt with a widespread number of issues ranging from the environment to slavery.

Professor Francisco da Fonseca Ramos of the Federal University of Pará revealed that illegal gold miners released 900 tons of mercury in the Amazon region in the 80s. Between 470 and 710 tons of this total was released into the atmosphere in the form of gas. In the Cuiu-Cuiu River area of Pará, 100% of the fish have been affected by mercury contamination.

Extractive reserves were another controversial issue at the seminar. Alfredo Homma, a researcher employed by the government, said that people have "unrealistic" expectations of the significance of extractive reserves, large tracts of land set aside solely for the purpose of sustainable development. Extractive reserves remain national property and traditional forest dwellers are granted long-term leases to use the earmarked land.



Thus, land reform and environmental preservation is accomplished at the same time. Homma claimed that, so far, there are only 100,000 families who support themselves through extractive activities on the established reserves. The Amazon specialist Mary Allegretti, from the Institute of Amazon Studies (IEA), criticized Homma's position. She stressed that extractivism is an important option for the region and that the only opposition to the reserves comes from ranchers who want to log the land instead of conserve it.

Sindamazônia also discussed setting up a Traditional Peoples' Center, a body that would be responsible for the promotion of techniques the Caiapó indigenous communities use to cure diseases through native plants. Darrell Posey, a U.S. researcher who has been part of Belém's Goeldi Museum's team for 15 years, stated that the Caiapós use over 600 plant species with medicinal properties.

The Bodyshop, an English natural cosmetics company, is already buying Brazil nuts in Pará to produce hair conditioners and essential oils. "We are familiar with only 2% of the plants in the Amazon while the indigenous peoples have been using plants for every imaginable purpose for centuries," said Posey. He added that selling nuts, oils and other forest products to foreign firms encourages sustainable forest management and is also more lucrative than logging or raising cattle in the region.

One of the world's foremost Amazon experts, Philip Fearnside from the Institute of Amazonian Research (Inpa), proposed the recovery and conservation of 400,000 square kilometers of Amazon land already devastated. He mentioned that only levying heavy taxes as punishment for land speculation would hinder logging. An Inpa agronomist stated that recovery of the region, equivalent to the size of Spain, would require an investment of \$30 billion over a 40-year period.

Pará's Catholic priest Ricardo Rezende, who spoke recently at the U.N. on land conflict in the country, proposed expropriating ranches that continue to use slave labor. According to the priest, a survey carried out by the Church claims that there are over 40,000 people enslaved in the country. Rezende was one of many seminar participants glad of the tight security at the seminar site; he has lost count of how many times his life has been threatened by rural landowners.

The priest claims that 1,700 rural workers have been slain in the last 11 years. None of the murders resulted in prosecutions. Amnesty International does not agree with these figures; the human rights organization deems them to be much too conservative.