

POVOS INDÍGENAS NO BRASIL

FONTE : The New York Times

CLASS. : 1397

DATA : 26 06 91

PG. : A9
International

THE NEW YORK TIMES INTERNATIONAL WEDNESDAY, JUNE 26, 1991

A9

Brazilian Leader Acts to Protect the Amazon

By JAMES BROOKE
Special to The New York Times

RIO DE JANEIRO, June 25 — Facing criticism over Brazil's Amazon policies, President Fernando Collor de Mello has dismissed the head of Brazil's Indian protection agency and has unveiled a program to allow foreign financing of environmental projects here.

In another move, he promised Monday to abolish tax subsidies that make it profitable to cut down Amazon rain forest for farming and ranching.

The steps, hailed by environmentalists here, came after Mr. Collor visited Washington last week and heard eight

American senators urge the Brazilian Government "to live up to its commitments on the environment and human rights in the Amazon."

The international criticism comes at a particularly sensitive moment. Next month, at the meeting of the seven leading industrial democracies in London, Brazil plans to submit a proposal for \$1.5 billion in grants for a five-year program for conservation of the Brazilian rain forests.

At home, Brazilian environmentalists charge that during Mr. Collor's 15 months as President he has slashed money for Amazon preservation projects and has failed to fulfill prom-

ises to demarcate Indian lands.

The annual Amazon burning season is under way, just as Brazil's environmental agency has been paralyzed by a three-week-old strike over low pay. Of \$8 million budgeted for a fire prevention program in the Amazon, only \$900,000 has actually been disbursed to the agency.

On the Indian issue, Brazil's Constitution stipulates that by October 1993 the Government must survey and give legal protection to 237 areas identified as Indian homelands.

"With the Government one year old, the process of demarcation has practically stopped," reads a new report on

Indian lands by the Ecumenical Center for Documentation and Information, a church group.

In Washington, Mr. Collor reportedly was irritated to learn from American lawmakers and environmentalists that up to 8,000 gold miners had reinvaded lands of the Yanomami Indian tribe. Last year, the police expelled as many as 30,000 miners from the area.

On Friday, the day after he returned from Washington, Mr. Collor dismissed Cantídio Guerreiro Guimarães, president of Funai, Brazil's Indian protection agency. Mr. Collor said the agency head dragged his feet on demarcating a continuous Yanomami reserve in Brazil's northern state of Roraima.

"The miners are a constant menace to the health of the Yanomami," Mr. Collor said in an interview before his United States trip. "We have to guaran-

tee the Yanomami a space so they don't lose their cultural identity or their habitat."

This week, Brazil's federal police are to resume a program of evacuating miners and dynamiting their airstrips.

Claudia Andujar, a longtime critic of Brazil's policies toward the Yanomami, said today that she believed Mr. Collor was now serious about demarcating a reserve.

"We think that with all this international pressure, President Collor is entirely interested in speeding demarcation," said Ms. Andujar, who is coordinator of a private group, the Commission for the Creation of a Yanomami Park.

In another policy turnaround, Mr. Collor announced Monday that he will allow \$100 million of Brazilian debt to be exchanged every year for financing

for environmental projects.

Under this financing mechanism, a foreign government or private nature group buys Brazilian debt on the secondary market, where it currently trades for 34 percent of face value. The Brazilian Government then retires the debt by paying 70 to 75 percent of its face value into a local currency account for environmental projects.

Last year, Brazilian environmentalists drew up a list of \$25 million of potential projects — training park guards, surveying park boundaries, endowing Amazon study institutes and buying jeeps and helicopters.

Although already in use in several Latin American nations, the so-called "debt for nature swaps" never started here because of opposition by Zélia Cardoso de Mello, Brazil's Economy Minister until early May.