

CEDI

Povos Indígenas no Brasil

Fonte NYT Class.: 04R00209
 Data 12/04/89 Pg.: _____

THE NEW YORK TIMES, WEDNESDAY, APRIL 12, 1989

Rio Branco Journal

A Death in the Amazon, From Symbol to Script

By JAMES BROOKE

Special to The New York Times

RIO BRANCO, Brazil — The movie producer's business card read "Beverly Hills," but her T-shirt proclaimed "The Union of Acre Natives."

"We have a track record of movies based on true stories," she said, her earnest demeanor contrasting with the languid air of this river town in Acre, a remote Amazonian state. "We make controversial films that others would be afraid to touch."

But as she spoke, Rio Branco's international telephone lines crackled with movie industry names.

In Death, a Symbol

Hollywood is beating a path and padding a canoe to the door of Ilzamar Mendes, the young widow of Francisco (Chico) Mendes. Mr. Mendes, a leader of Brazil's rubber tappers, was killed by a shotgun blast on Dec. 22.

In life, Mr. Mendes organized Acre's passive rubber gatherers to block large landowners from burning down expanses of Amazonian rain forest for cattle pasture. By one estimate, his movement saved three million acres of forest since 1975.

In death, the union leader has become a worldwide symbol of the effort to slow the destruction of Brazil's massive rain forest.

An Italian environmental group recently proposed the Nobel Peace Prize for the soft-spoken union leader, who followed the principles of non-violent resistance. Mr. Mendes has emerged as a martyr for this nation's growing environmental movement.

'It's All Very New'

In March, the authorities in Curitiba, a southern city, unveiled a Chico Mendes memorial. The centerpiece is a marble copy of a letter he wrote to the police last year detailing death threats made against him by local landowners.



Haroldo de Faria Castro

Ilzamar Mendes at a news conference last month in Washington with Francisco de Assis Monteiro de Oliveira, head of a rubber tappers' cooperative in Acre state in Brazil. Mrs. Mendes accepted a post-

humorous award for her husband, Francisco (Chico) Mendes, who was killed three months ago by a shotgun blast and has become a symbol of the effort to slow the destruction of Brazil's rain forest.

Present at the ceremony was Mrs. Mendes, who had just returned from a trip to New York and to Washington, where she accepted a posthumous award for her husband.

Mrs. Mendes and other members of the newly formed Chico Mendes Foundation are weighing 10 offers as they prepare to select the studio that will film the story of her slain husband. The sale of film rights could bring the foundation \$1 million, a Hollywood producer estimated here.

The last week of March, journalists, filmmakers and unionists from Brazil, Europe and the United States converged here to cover the second congress of the National Council of Rubber Tappers. When the congress was planned last year, it was expected that Mr. Mendes would be elected president.

Despite the international exposure fueling what is becoming the Chico Mendes myth, the gritty reality of the Acre rain forest lacks romance. Mr. Barbosa, Mrs. Mendes and five other leaders of the tappers' union have also received death threats.

"We union leaders have short life spans here," Osmarino Amâncio Rodrigues said.

Mr. Amâncio, who was elected first



The New York Times/April 12, 1989

Hollywood, eager to capitalize on a tale of martyrdom, has beaten a path to Rio Branco.

secretary of the council, said that in mid-February gunmen tried to attack his home in Brasília near the Bolivian frontier.

"Wherever I go, the 'pistoleiros' go," the union leader said of the gunmen. "When I go to the bus station,

they ask the ticket clerk where I'm going."

Mr. Amâncio said the state government gave him four military policemen as guards. But, he said, the state required that he pay for the policemen's food and travel expenses.

At police headquarters here, Louvival Marques de Oliveira, Acre's state secretary of security, retorted that Mr. Amâncio insisted on bringing his police guards into "fancy restaurants."

Interviewed separately, the police chief and the unionists both agreed on one thing: Blood may soon flow again in the jungle.

The city jail here holds two landowners who face charges in Mr. Mendes's murder. In March, the Ministry of Agriculture designated part of a forest tract these landowners claimed as their own, and named it the Chico Mendes Reserve.

"There are other tracts of rubber forest that landowners say they plan to burn," said Raimundo Mendes de Barros, a harried-looking union official and a cousin of Mr. Mendes, who was helping to organize another sit-in in the forest.

"If we get enough families out," he said, "the landowners usually back down."

THE NEW YORK TIMES
 229 West 43d Street New York, N.Y. 10036
 (212) 556-1234
 Home Delivery Information: 1-800-631-2500

The New York Times (ISSN 0362-4331) is published daily. Second-class postage paid at New York, N.Y., and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to The New York Times, 2800 West 96th Street, Suite 201, Hickory Hills, IL 60459.

Mail Subscription Rates

	1 Yr.	6 Mos.	3 Mos.
Weekdays and Sundays	\$234.00	\$132.24	\$72.36
Weekdays	156.00	85.92	47.11
Sundays	120.00	66.19	36.89
Times Book Review	31.20		

Higher rates, available on request, for mailing New York edition outside northeastern U.S.
 Rates to other countries on request: 1-800-631-2500.

All advertising published in The New York Times is subject to the applicable rate card, available from the advertising department. The Times reserves the right not to accept an advertiser's order. Only publication of an advertisement shall constitute final acceptance.

The Associated Press is entitled exclusively to the use for republication of all news dispatches created by it or not otherwise credited in this paper and local news of spontaneous origin published herein. Rights for republication of all other matter herein are also reserved.