

**A PROMISE**

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**FULFILLED**

tioning in his meeting with timber trade and environmental representatives at the Brazilian Embassy last December. Why, delegates wanted to know, had the government delayed the release of the 1995 and 1996 deforestation data, on three occasions since November 1996? Was it because the news was so terrible that it was reluctant to make it public?

No, insisted Dr Martins. The information had been delayed purely because of problems in processing the data. A lot of new information was to be included this time, leading to a great deal of extra work.

But what about the satellite photographs cited by WWF-Brazil, indicating that 1996 and 1997 had each been, successively, the 'worst ever' years for fires in the Amazon? According to the WWF, the number of fires recorded in September rose from 14,740 in 1995, to 16,371 in 1996 and 20,469 fires in 1997.

ran, officially, at some 1,500,000h per year?!

Deforestation data

Dr Martins brushed these findings aside. The rate of burning, he said, had in fact gone down substantially from 1995 to 1996, and further reductions were expected in 1997. The deforestation data, he promised, would be released by the end of December, or early 1998 at the latest (at time of writing, they have still not been released). In any case, he maintained, only 6% of the burnt area was new deforestation, and the rest of it was 'pasture management'.

This figure is contested by the Woods Hole Research Centre, and the Amazonian Institute of Environmental Research (IPAM). Their data indicate that only 73% of burning is on already deforested land. Fully 16% of burning is in mature forest, and a further 11% of burning takes

**W**hen Eduardo Martins took over as president of the Brazilian Environment Agency, IBAMA, in early 1996, hopes were high among the British timber trade and environmental lobby groups that the sugared words of his predecessors would at last be translated into action.

Here, they believed, was the man to bring a scandal-ridden IBAMA under control, to call a halt to the mass deforestation of rainforest for cattle ranching and other inappropriate land uses; to assure the sound environmental management of the Amazon for mahogany, cedar and other fine timbers, and to bring the illegal timber trade, rife across the Amazon region, to a decisive close.

The article in ITI which followed (ITI October 19, 1996) was an expression of those hopes, painting as it did a picture of a young man, enthusiastic and brimming over with ideas for a brighter future.

Two years on, hope has given way to cynicism, as promised progress has failed to materialise. For example, Brazil's forest protection budget has been cut by 64%, from US\$492m in 1996, to US\$179m in 1997.

Little surprise, then, that Dr Martins found himself under tough ques-

**The Brazilian government has committed to dedicating 10% of the area of all its forest types, including the Amazon, as protected areas by the year 2000, and aims to preserve 75% of the Amazon's biodiversity. But environmentalists question whether loggers will be allowed into forest reserves and national parks**

PHOTOS OF AMAZON RAINFOREST IN IAU NATIONAL PARK NORTH OF MANAUS AND THE ENDANGERED WHITE UAKARI BY EDWARD PARKER

And what of the data from the US's National Oceanographic and Aeronautic Administration (NOAA) which recorded 29,571 fires in July-November 1996, and 44,734 fires in the same period in 1997 - an increase of over 50%? And the data from Rondonia, released by the World Bank's Planaltoro project, which show that the average rate of deforestation in 1995 and 1996 was 70% higher than in 1992 to 1994 (when deforestation

place under the canopy of standing forest, dramatically changing its structure and ecology. 'In years of intense drought such as 1997 the area of forest ground fire will increase dramatically', adds IPAM.

Further questions arose over the decision of the Brazilian government to designate 10% of the area of all its forest types, including the Amazon, as protected areas by 2000. The 'ecological corridors' so created would

**Eighteen months ago, Oliver Tickell examined the complex state of the Brazilian mahogany trade - among the most controversial of timber environmental issues. Last December, he took the opportunity, along with other press, environmentalists and British timber trade representatives, to ask Dr Eduardo Martins, head of the Brazilian Environment Agency IBAMA, how far things had progressed**

'not only protect species, but protect biodiversity at the landscape level' while accommodating sustainable forest use by local communities. The aim was to preserve 75% of the Brazilian Amazon's biodiversity.

The forest protection initiative was generally welcomed, and appears, as Ambassador Barbosa wrote to the Duke of Edinburgh, to meet the WWF target for forest conservation. But, Friends of the Earth campaigner Sarah Tyack wanted to know, would this 'protected area' be open to logging?

Well - yes and no, came Dr Martins' answer. The 'protected area' would include a number of different forest designations including not only biological reserves, strategic reserves and sustainable development reserves, but also National Forest. And National Forest is a category specifically intended for areas available for commercial use.

Dr Martins did not know how much of the 'protected area' would be closed to logging. 'It is impossible to say', he said. 'It depends on the application of the appropriate criteria on each site'. By this point, even Dr Martins' accompanying civil servants were looking uncomfortable.

'We believe it is possible for loggers to obtain 40 or 50 million hectares of National Forest over the next 10 years, to establish appropriate and sustainable production of timber and define a whole new way of forestry', Dr Martins persisted - apparently oblivious of the poor record of logging companies in the Amazon, which has led the UK's biggest DIY retailers to abandon the use of Brazilian mahogany.

A clearly dissatisfied Terence Mallinson, chairman of the Forests Forever Advisory Council, who has many times defended the mahogany trade to sceptical environmentalists, sought assurances that the protected areas would be adequately monitored. Of course they would, said Dr Martins, before conceding that 'more people are needed on the ground'.

Asked about the parts of the Amazon that fall outside protected areas, National Forest and indigenous reserves, which account for about two thirds of its area, he said: 'The Brazilian government is taking measures to limit the conversion of each private property from 50% to 20%. The government has demonstrated its capacity to take difficult decisions to avoid deforestation.'

But Dr Martins could not say just how much land would be affected by

this new policy. He explained that 'the legal situation is confused due to the history of the Amazon'. That information would have to await the outcome of an Amazon-wide zoning exercise. Under the new land tax policy, a record was being drawn up of all private properties in the Amazon region. Only when the exercise was complete would it be possible to say

Terence Mallinson brought the subject back to logging, clearly stating the UK industry position. 'There is no place in this country's timber trade for illegal timber', he said. 'It is bad for our business and bad for the forests we rely on for future timber supplies.' So what success could Dr Martins claim in clamping down on the illegal trade, which has been estimated to account for 80% of all mahogany extraction?

#### Improved control

In 1996, said Dr Martins, the number of mahogany management plans was reduced by 75% (550 out of 729 projects were found to be irregular), and only 263 new plans were put forward in 1997. 'We have fewer management plans and fewer new applications, so that means improved control', said Dr Martins.

Improved monitoring and control had resulted in the seizure of about 100,000m<sup>3</sup> of timber in 1996, while 10 fines of US\$1m had been levied. He was unable to comment on findings, from Para, that only 10.5% of fines for timber infractions were ever actually paid.

IBAMA's aim, he said, was to reduce the illegal trade from 80% to

**Brazil nut trees are the only trees standing after forest is cut and burnt in Brazil.**

**According to the WWF, the number of forest fires in the Amazon rose from 14,750 in 1995 to 16,371 in 1996 and 20,469 in 1997**

PHOTO: EDWARD PARKER

50% in 1998. 'This is still too high but the truth is you can't change too much in the short term'. It was essential to control illegal logging, he said, since profits from illegal timber provided capital for deforestation.

The forthcoming Environmental Crime Law, due for approval by Congress, would be essential, for example by setting a system of fixed penalties. This was illustrated by events in Para. Last year, said Dr Martins, IBAMA intercepted 26,000m<sup>3</sup> of mahogany taken from indigenous reserves in Para state, but lost its legal actions against those responsible. 'It is impossible to control court decisions', he complained. Even the seized timber 'disappeared' from its impoundment site.

Remote sensing by aerial photography and satellite would be vital to the effort. The 'Amazon Surveillance System', which was being assembled, would prove vital in detecting illegal logging.

In tandem, ground staff would have GPS (global positioning satellite) in their vehicles and radio contact with head office - increasing their operational effectiveness and reducing opportunities for corruption. The most recent and as yet unpublished figures claimed Dr Martins, showed a six-fold increase in IBAMA's effectiveness, with an astonishing 600,000m<sup>3</sup> of timber impounded in 1997.

However, he was unable to explain the lack of prosecutions following the TV documentary 'The Mahogany Trail', broadcast in the UK in May 1996 on Channel Four. ▶

# LATIN AMERICA: BRAZIL

Although both its research methods and conclusions were subsequently called into question by the company at its centre and the UK Timber Trade Federation (TTF), the film showed how Richard Hering and Stuart Tanner of Direct TV followed mahogany marked with UV ink from the Xikrim do Catele indigenous reserve in southern Para (location confirmed by global positioning satellite), to the export yard of Nordisk Timber in Belem. The two investigators informed both Nordisk and IBAMA of the presence of what they alleged to be stolen mahogany, and entered the Nordisk yard with IBAMA officials and identified the timber in question.

'Even though we had conclusive proof of the stolen timber and of the false documentation, and backed up by videotaped evidence, IBAMA did not impound the timber, which Nordisk subsequently exported, nor

did it bring any prosecutions', claimed Mr Tanner. He added that the findings also 'rode a coach and horses' through the mahogany export Accord between AIMEX (the Association of Timber Exporting Companies of Para), and the TTF, which is intended to guarantee to British consumers that all mahogany traded in the UK is legal.

The Xikrim do Catele timber, Mr Tanner believes, was probably exported with Nordisk's next major shipment to Heysham, Lancashire. Nordisk, a signatory to the AIMEX/TTF Accord, declined to allow the shipment to be examined, and the suspect timber was sold into the UK market.

'Even when shown the evidence, Nordisk chose to ignore it and sold the timber as normal', says Tanner. 'Neither IBAMA, AIMEX, nor the TTF imposed any sanction on Nordisk. All their reassurances have been exposed as worthless bits of paper.'

According to Mr Tanner, an examination of export statistics in Belem

**Top: the whole of Brazil's timber industry, vital to its economy, is tarnished by the government's seeming inability to control illegal logging and complacency among respectable timber trading companies as to where their logs are sourced**

**Above: years after Brazil's environmental problems were drawn to the attention of the world, the mahogany trade remains in the shadow of controversy**

PHOTO TOP COURTESY OF THE TTF  
PHOTO BOTTOM COURTESY OF THE TTF

revealed that, between January and October 1994, Nordisk exported 15,496m<sup>3</sup> of mahogany, of which only 527m<sup>3</sup>, or 3.4%, came from companies whose management plans were subsequently confirmed by IBAMA in its 1996 review.

Nordisk refuted most of the documentary's allegations, reported in TTF June 1, 1996, in a letter (TTF June 8, 1996). Erik Albrechtson said the documentary makers had not been interested in attempts by Nordisk to provide them with information on the complexity of the indigenous people's situation in Brazil; the journalists had not been prepared to supply details of their investigations so the company could respond; and that they had used outdated undercover tactics, when the company would have welcomed open dialogue. 'Nordisk is a signatory to the AIMEX/NHA Accord and we are serious about this,' he said. 'We react immediately if we have any suspicion of illegal supplies.'

The TTF's Graham Bruford concurred. 'There are doubts over whether the journalists conducted themselves in Brazil, over whether the timber originated in an indigenous reserve at all, and whether it was actually traced to the Nordisk yard,' he said. 'We have asked IBAMA about this and they said they were satisfied that Nordisk did not behave improperly or illegally in any way, and as far as we are concerned that is the end of the story.'

He added that the TTF was currently working with AIMEX, IBAMA and the Soil Association to develop a log-tracking system for mahogany, to provide even stronger assurances of legality.

Conservationists, however, are also unhappy that Dr Martins, at the 1997 CITES meeting in Harare, lobbied against the US/Bolivia proposal to list Brazilian mahogany under Appendix II of CITES, so that the necessary two thirds majority was not reached by seven votes. Instead, Brazil announced its intention to list mahogany under Appendix III (which does not need a vote of CITES members), under which its exports would need to be labelled with their country of origin, helping the monitoring of the international trade.

In so doing, Brazil followed the lead set by Costa Rica in 1995. Bolivia followed suit in 1997. Rather than immediately making the listing effective, however, Brazil has now opted to embark on lengthy consultations with other range states and importing countries. It was also to have set up a working group to consider the issues, to have its first meeting in January 1998 and report back to CITES in March 1999. However, the first meeting of the group has been repeatedly delayed.

'Not only did Brazil lobby heavily to block the Appendix II proposal, but they are now failing to progress their compromise solution', complained Sarah Tyack.

Other developments in Brazil do not augur well. The budget of FUNAI, Brazil's agency for indigenous people, has been cut by one third. And President Cardoso is pushing legislation through Congress intended to open up indigenous territories to mining claims.

Dr Martins may have entered his job with good intentions, but the climate in which he is operating appears hostile. Nothing short of a miracle will be needed if he is to fulfill his early promise. ■