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Povos Indígenas no Brasil

Fonte New York Times Class.: Amaz. / Queimadas
 Data 30.09.89 Pg.: 33

Letter: On Ecology

Help Brazil Preserve the Amazon

To the Editor:

Your editorial "Forest Murder: Ours and Theirs — Brazil's Season of Shame" (Sept. 20), on the burning of the Amazon forest, is inaccurate, naïve and does not help the serious efforts that are being made in Brazil to stop it.

What has taken place in that area in the last 15 years is indeed disgraceful, since the development projects encouraged by Government incentives proved to be uneconomic and not sustainable in the medium term. That does not mean land speculation has not enriched a handful of the privileged. However, the approval of new incentives has been stopped as of 1988 and the Government must be credited for that.

As a result, deforestation has been decreasing and 1989 promises to be a particularly good year in that respect, although a lot of burning still takes place due mostly to ancient agricultural practices (queimadas) in the cerrado region, or already deforested areas. The total cleared area in the Amazon region was measured by the Brazilian Space Research Institute in 1988, and it is close to 5 percent, not 12 percent as frequently quoted in World Bank reports.

The naïveté in your editorial lies in the idea that "extractivism" of fruits, rubber and raw materials for medical or beauty products can yield good economic results. That might indeed be true on a small scale, but it ignores the fact that in a free enterprise sys-

tem it is difficult to avoid exploitation of others by a few rich landowners, as is the case in the Amazon area.

Destructive burning in the Amazon region (as contrasted with the queimadas, which are not destructive in the same sense) has to stop. The burning contributes some 4 percent to the world's present carbon dioxide emissions, and efforts to reduce emissions in other countries are also needed. Brazilians will need real help, not admonitions, to open up new development options for the population already in place. Acting otherwise is hypocrisy!

JOSE GOLDEMBERG
 São Paulo, Brazil, Sept. 22, 1989

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