Rubber-Tappers Need Your Help

Recent Gains Threatened by Government Reversals

Rubber tappers in the Brazilian Amazon have found themselves in an increasingly precarious position over the last year. Rubber prices have collapsed, and the Brazilian government has failed to follow through on a program to create extractive reserves that would promote the harvest of rubber without damaging the rainforest.

Meanwhile, despite international outrage over the murder of the rubber-tappers' union leader, Chico Mendes, by cattle ranchers, the government has renewed its support of the cattle industry, one of the leading destroyers of Amazonian rainforest.

Almost alone among government officials, however, Environment Secretary Jose Lutzenberger has acted to help the rubber tappers, and has thereby made a critical contribution to the preservation of the Amazon. Your letters in support of Lutzenberger are urgently needed at this time.

There are some 68,500 rubber-tapper families in the Brazilian Amazon, occupying between 90,000 and 150,000 square miles, an area roughly equal to that part of the Amazon already deforested (about 8.4 percent). Although they have won the legal creation of about 12,000 square miles of extractive reserves, lack of government action on demarcation of these reserves now threatens them gravely.

Meanwhile, deteriorating economic conditions and expansion of cattle ranches are driving many tappers out of the Amazon. In the last year alone, government-controlled Amazon rubber prices have fallen by two-thirds in relation to the prices of goods the tappers buy. Many families have gone from poverty to near-total destitution. While other economic activities receive massive government subsidies (most notoriously, the tax-credit program for cattle ranching), rubber tappers have historically received few such benefits.

In April, however, with Lutzenberger's support, the rubber tappers were able to convince the government to agree in principle to raise rubber prices to those of a year ago. They will now push the government to address the urgent need to demarcate the already decreed extractive reserves and to carry out the National Extractive Reserves Program, through which new areas inhabited by rubber tappers and similar groups will become reserves.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

International support of Environment Secretary Jose Lutzenberger's work on behalf of the rubber tappers is extremely important. Please write, fax, or telex Lutzenberger. A two-sentence paragraph is sufficient, though you should feel free to say more. (Send to: Ilmo. Sr. Jose Lutzenberger, Secretario de Meio Ambiente da Presidencia da Republica, Esplanada dos Ministérios, 70.000 Brasilia D.F., Brazil; fax: 011-55-61-226-4345; telex: 611711 or 612120.)

Please send copies of your letter to Brazil's president, Ilmo. Sr. Fernando Collor de Mello, Presidente da Republica, Palacio do Planalto, 70.150 Brasilia D.F., Brazil; fax: 011-55-61-226-7566 or 011-55-61-211-1221; telex: 611088; and to Brazil's U.S. ambassador, Marcilio Marques Moreira, Brazilian Embassy, 3006 Massachusetts Ave, N.W., Washington DC 20008; fax: (202) 745-2728.

Dear Secretary Lutzenberger:

I am writing to support your position on the protection of the Amazon rainforest and the rubber tappers. I urge you to continue to support a just price for Amazon rubber, demarcation of extractive reserves, and the immediate activation of the National Extractive Reserves Program. Thank you for your courage and vision.

Your purchase of this T-shirt will help support Brazil's Forest Peoples' Alliance. See back page for information.

International postage for a one-page letter is 52 cents.
Rainforest Heroes Win Goldman Award

Four rainforest activists are among the winners of the prestigious 1991 Goldman Environmental Prize, given annually to grassroots heroes from each of the world’s six inhabited continents. The Goldman award is the world’s largest environmental prize program, with each winner receiving $60,000.

Yoichi Kuroda, nominated by RAN, won the award for Asia. Kuroda is the coordinator of Japan’s Tropical Forest Action Network, an organization dedicated to curtailing the massive importation of inexpensive tropical timber into Japan. The destruction of tropical forests in Thailand, the Philippines and Malaysia led Kuroda to organize the first protests in Japan on deforestation. Kuroda has been a leader in exposing the Japanese corporations contributing to rainforest destruction.

The winner from South America, Evaristo Nugkuag, is an Aguaruna Indian from Peru and the founder of the Coordinating Body of Indigenous People’s Organizations of the Amazon Basin (COICA). Recognizing that indigenous peoples and international conservation groups share the mutual goal of preserving the world’s remaining rainforests, Nugkuag has been building an alliance between them. (Last year RAN participated in the “First Summit” between COICA and international activists.)

Three years ago, the European co-winner, Roland Tiensuu of Sweden, now twelve years old, had the idea of founding Children’s Rainforest because he was concerned that there would be no rainforests left by the time he and his classmates grew up. Guided by Roland’s teacher (and co-winner), Eha Kern, Children’s Rainforest has raised over $1.5 million to help Costa Rica’s Monteverde Conservation League purchase 2,833 acres of rainforest.

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Buy a T-Shirt, Support Brazil’s Forest People

RAN is proud to offer a special-edition T-shirt in support of Brazil’s Forest Peoples’ Alliance, the umbrella organization that includes the Union of Indian Nations, the National Council of Rubber Tappers, riverine communities, fruit gatherers and others living sustainably in the Amazon.

The four-color shirt, pictured on the front page of this Alert, shows three Ticuna Indian children and reads “Brazilian Forest Peoples’ Alliance.” Proceeds will go to the Alliance. Send your contribution of $20 (or more, if you like) to: Alliance T-Shirt, Rainforest Action Network, 301 Broadway, Suite A, San Francisco, CA 94111. Please specify small, medium, large, or extra-large.

Save the Rainforests...

...It's more than just a phrase, it's the basis of everything we do at the Rainforest Action Network. Won't you please help by beginning or renewing your membership?

I want to □ begin □ renew my membership in the Rainforest Action Network with a tax-deductible donation of:

□ $100 □ $50 □ $35 □ $25 □ $15*  
* Limited income

Name

Address

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