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A LANDMARK IN THE HISTORY OF THE FOREST
PEOPLES' MOVEMENT

- * THE ALTAMIRA GATHERING, BRAZIL, 20 - 24 FEBRUARY 1989

- * THE STRATEGY AND PROJECTS OF THE FOREST PEOPLE

Paulinho Payakan Kayapo
Leader of the Kayapo Nation,
who called the Gathering on behalf
of his people



Ailton Krenak
National Coordinator of the Union
of Indian Nations

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THE ALTAMIRA GATHERING OF FOREST PEOPLE

CAN YOU IMAGINE...?

Can you imagine how it was for 900 Indian people from 38 different Indian Nations* to come together in solidarity, most of them meeting for the first time?

In some cases Indian Nations, such as the Kayapo and the Xavante, are traditional rivals. Yet they travelled for six days by bus to join their 'brothers and sisters', for the first time in their history, to protect the forests and their cultures. This created a very poignant atmosphere, and was the foundation of a vibrant meeting.

It took place in the small town of Altamira on the Xingu River in Eastern Amazonia. The meeting was called by the elected leader of the Kayapo Indian Nation, Paulinho Payakan, on behalf of his people. A series of dams are proposed for the Xingu River, the first being near Altamira. These dams would flood huge areas of forest, much of which is the ancestral home of the Indian people. Hundreds of other forest dwellers, rubber tappers and river-bank settlers would also be flooded out of their forest homes. They would lose their cultural identity and most would be destined to be discarded to spend the rest of their lives in hopelessness and poverty in urban centres.

People travelled from all over Brazil to pledge their support to the Forest People: politicians, trade union leaders, urban leaders, black leaders, scientists and academics. More than 50 different social and environmental groups from around Brazil were represented. A Government Minister and a representative from Eletronorte, the Company which has proposed the dam, were also present.

Individuals and organisations involved in environmental and human rights issues came from around the world. Native North Americans also travelled to the Gathering to give their support. And messages came from many who were not able to attend, including the Malaysian Forest People.

The Gathering received tremendous national and international media coverage, being attended by over 200 journalists from all over the world, together with 20 TV teams. This meeting is said to have received the biggest press coverage ever recorded in Brazil's history.

* The Forest People consider themselves as separate Nations because they each have a different language and different cultural traditions. They do not like being called 'tribes' because of the 'primitive' connotations which this holds.

THE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS

The Indian leaders and other Forest People emphasised that they were questioning the very idea of dams. Who would really benefit? Only the multi-nationals who built the dams, Western banks, and the cities and industries in the south of Brazil who would receive the hydro-electric power. People in the town of Altamira may have jobs for a short period, but nothing more. There would be no long term 'progress' for the local Brazilians.

They also questioned why it is that the Forest People are never consulted or advised of 'development' plans? Even the environmental impact studies which have to be done before projects are passed by the World Bank and other agencies, never include the opinions of the indigenous people. Their ancestral roots, their culture and their way of life is completely disregarded. It was only when Payakan and Kube-i (another Kayapo leader) were in Washington that they learned of the detailed proposals for the Xingu River. As Brazilian citizens, they insisted that they be consulted before any plans for their forests were proposed.

THE ATMOSPHERE

The Meeting took place in the community hall in the small red mud town of Altamira in the Eastern part of the Amazon Rainforest. Every morning for five days the Indians arrived at the hall by bus, tumbling out chanting in colourful feathers and adornments. As they entered the hall each group did a circular dance to bless the place before being seated.

On the first day, when Payakan entered, hundreds of cameras began to flash as people tried to capture his every move. He sat at a long table on a platform, joined each day by different leaders and invited speakers. Indian people from various Nations were invited to speak from the floor and bear witness to what they had experienced and how they felt about dams and other 'development' projects. White people who wanted to speak could do so for only a limited time, as the Indians say that they "begin to lie if they speak for more than 5 minutes".

The quality of the meeting was remarkable. The statements were given in a way that vividly contrasted with the shouting and abuse that accompanies many of the political meetings with which we are familiar in the West. Each person waited their turn and then gracefully walked up to the platform. Here even when they were angry, they spoke with a dignity which reflected the firmness of their convictions.

The Indians in the hall sat attentively; the people from Altamira came to see, and as the week went by their numbers increased; the observers listened intently, imbibing the natural calm order of the Indian way; and the Press darted around trying to capture each angle, expression and sensation.

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One incident particularly mobilised the cameras, and later dominated the Brazilian papers. A Kayapo woman challenged the President of Eletronorte, the dam-building company. She went to the platform with firm intention and with precise control wielded her machete close to the President's face. At one point she pressed the flat side of the blade to each of his cheeks. He and the hall sat in still silence.

Payakan stood calmly watching, as did the other Indians. He then, slowly and carefully explained that this was not an act of violence or aggression. It is the Kayapo custom when confronting someone who has violated you or your people. His explanation was not included in any of the reports of the incident.

In the afternoons the camp which the Indians had set up just outside Altamira was open to visitors. Here there was a great sense of peace, as if the intensity of the Gathering was quite naturally contained in the steady rhythm of forest life. The women sat in their long open houses, some with children lying contentedly across their laps. The men too sat with their children or smoked their pipes pensively. As the evening drew on the fish would be placed on the fire. However, when they felt that their privacy was being violated or that the visitors had overstayed their welcome, they said so in no uncertain terms.

In the evenings the Brazilian environmental groups met, inviting international participation.

The meeting closed with a ritual corn dance. As it came to an end, a rainbow appeared in the sky, complete from one horizon to the other. Even the most sceptical were stopped in their tracks for a moment.

THE RESPONSE OF THE BRAZILIAN GOVERNMENT

President Sarney of Brazil returned from Japan the day the Gathering ended, having been refused finance for a road across Acre in Western Amazonia through the Andes to Lima in Peru. He was extremely angry because he saw this as the result of the persistent campaigning of the Forest People and the national and international environmental and human rights groups. He now accuses the ecologists of being the new imperialists, trying to hinder 'progress'.

This, together with the massive international attention which the Altamira Gathering received, has put the Brazilian Government in an extremely difficult position. They are now having to recognise the existence of the Indian people and their growing political power. They can no longer refuse to negotiate with the original people of the forests, those who inhabited Brazil long before it was given this name.

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However, such a change in attitude does not come easily. It was only in November 1988, after many years of intense campaigning, that the Indian people were 'granted' full Brazilian citizenship and the associated rights. Until this date, the Indians had been 'minors' and therefore had not been able to speak for themselves or enjoy the rights of full citizens.

The Brazilian Government is now saying that the Indian people are being 'manipulated by Western imperialism'. They have set up a six man commission of enquiry to look into who was involved in the Altamira Gathering. They argue that Western concern for the Rainforests is in fact an attempt to 'internationalize the Amazon'. International groups who campaign to 'buy Rainforests' or who say the Amazon Rainforest is a global resource contribute to the Brazilian Government's reaction.

However, those concerned with the Rainforest and its people must not be naive as to why their pressure may appear to be working. US President Bush is said to have exerted his influence on Japan not to build the road across Acre. On further investigation, we see that the road will open up the exportation of various goods from Brazil to Japan (aside from tropical wood) one of which is soya beans. Presently the US is the largest exporter of this product to Japan - the road would obviously open up competition.

In this case, the main objective is to protect the Tropical Forests and, as long as this is achieved, motivations are of secondary importance. It must be clear, however, that the Japanese will not be easily stopped from building this road. Secondly, ulterior motives may themselves have a negative impact. Thus peoples' motives must be constantly assessed in order to prevent campaigns from having unforeseen side effects.

THE FOREST PEOPLES' RESPONSE

The Indian leaders consider the accusation that they are being manipulated to be a reflection of white people's ignorance. They are quick to point out that their leadership is rooted in their villages. They would have no credibility as leaders of their people if they were influenced by any outside interests and would soon be replaced. This is especially so now, with the new generation of young people who are very weary of white promises. It is because white people do not understand the rigorous procedures through which decisions are made and leaders are empowered that they assume the Indians can be easily manipulated by international interests.

But how is it that the Brazilian Government can agree to the mega-'development' projects, which are inevitably constructed by Western based multinationals who receive most of the money? Why is it that Siemens of West Germany have recently moved their dam building section to Brazil? So they can better apply for contracts?

Moreover, Brazil borrows from Western banks and aid agencies to pay for these projects. Whatever is produced, such as the pig iron from the Carajas in Eastern Amazonia, is sold to the West cheaply so that the Brazilian Government can have a secure market in order to pay back their debt to the West. If the people of Brazil benefit at all, it is those few in the big cities who are already linked in to the Western monetary system, which draws money to the North like a magnet.

Most Brazilians lose at every stage in such projects. This cycle is relentlessly destructive, wiping out whole ecosystems, hundreds of species, thousands of people and their ancient cultures. It attracts ever more destitute victims from the urban centres to rural squalor and hopelessness. Only a few speculators may benefit.

Who is really being "manipulated by Western Imperialism"?

THE EQUILIBRIUM OF THE PLANET IS AT STAKE

Many leaders from different Nations stressed that they had lived in these forests for centuries before Europe 'discovered' South America. The white people do not understand the richness of the forests they are destroying. Their ignorance means that they do not realise the full implications of what they are doing. The Indians consider themselves to be the guardians of this ancient ecosystem, together with other Forest People who understand the forest. They have learnt to live in harmony with these fragile tropical areas, enjoying their multitude of gifts without harming them.

The ruthless devastation of the forest and its ancient people is forcing the Forest People to take a strong stand. They cannot allow more destruction. Many leaders said they feel a responsibility to protect the forests in order to "maintain the equilibrium of the Planet". This is what the white people are threatening in their ignorance. The situation is very serious. They feel a great sense of urgency, giving humankind ten years to stop recklessly undermining Nature on whom we all depend for our life. 'Civilization', they say, does not like to admit its ultimate dependency on Nature, but if it does not "recall its memory" we may not see the 21st Century:

"We hold the memory of the fundamental relationship between humankind and Nature. This is why we have to speak with a louder voice. This is why we are now inviting people who want to remember, to walk with us. We have to secure the equilibrium of the planet within the next ten years. The next generation of life is dependent on the choices of this generation."

Ailton Krenak
National Co-ordinator
Union of Indian Nations

THE INVITATION

The Union of Indian Nations (UNI) is the organisation through which the Indian Nations are able to unite to protect and regenerate their forests and their cultures. They have been developing their strategy for more than ten years and are now ready to invite participation from those who will "walk with them".

BRAZIL'S FOREST PEOPLES' MOVEMENT IN CONTEXT

The Forest Peoples' Movement in Brazil has been growing in strength, particularly over the last two years.

The Rubber Tappers' Movement, under the leadership of the late Chico Mendes, pioneered the strategy of Extractive Reserves. Research is under way on the economic value of rubber, Brazil nuts and other sustainable "extractive" products. These are being studied in contrast to the land uses that are at the root of deforestation in Amazonia - cattle ranching and commercial agriculture. Research is also being carried out on co-operatives, extractive production processes and the marketing of these products.

After a long struggle, the Governor of the State of Acre agreed to demarcate one such reserve in 1988. The assassination of Chico Mendes in December 1988 has been a tremendous setback for the Rubber Tappers. He was a man of great vision and compassion. As he once said:

"At first I thought I was fighting to save rubber trees, then I thought I was fighting to save the Amazon Rainforests. Now I realize I am fighting for Humanity."

Chico Mendes
Assassinated 22nd December 1988

The Rubber Tappers held a meeting in March 1989 to reassess their situation and strengthen their bonds with other Forest People.

The Union of Indian Nations (UNI) was born more than ten years ago, when a group of Indian students realised the need for their different Nations to work together in protecting the forest and their cultures. In 1986, when the Brazilian Constitution was being elaborated, The Union of Indian Nations set up a campaign to lobby for the incorporation of indigenous rights. Meanwhile, they began to consolidate their movement to build a strong united front by asking the village elders from various Indian Nations to participate in developing a strategy.

In February 1988, while this strategy was evolving, Payakan and Kube-i from the Kayapo Nation were invited to Washington to speak to the World Bank and various senators about their situation. On their return, together with their interpreter Darrell Posey, they were interrogated by the Brazilian Government and prosecuted as 'foreigners' interfering in Brazilian affairs.

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This made the Brazilian Government's attitude to the indigenous people transparent for the world to see. There was an international outcry.

Ironically, this prosecution threw the Kayapo people into an intense political process. At each court hearing they organised about 500 warriors to be present. They sent a number of delegations to Brasilia where the constitution was being revised. There they put pressure on the constituent assembly to incorporate indigenous rights.

A legal advisory group The Nucleus of Indigenous Rights, recently set up by the Union of Indian Nations, writes:

"The recognition of indigenous rights met with resistance in several areas of Federal Government, such as the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI); the National Department of Mineral Production (DNPM); the National Security Council (CSN); from economic interest groups, especially the mining companies; and from more conservative sectors who created a Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry in the National Congress with the intent of criminalizing Indian and support organizations, in order to make them incompatible with 'national interests'."

In November 1988, the new constitution incorporated indigenous rights - for the first time in the history of the country. This means the original people of Brazil now have the same rights as all other Brazilian citizens.

It was because of this new right to participate in the Brazilian political process that the Kayapo Indians called the Altamira Gathering. They emphasised that they were questioning the idea of dams and other mega-'development' projects, because so few people really benefit, least of all the Forest People and the poor. They called for alternative proposals to be tabled, rather than just one mega-strategy. Secondly, they highlighted the fact that the Indian people are never consulted when projects are proposed in their own areas. As full Brazilian citizens, they insist on their right to be involved in decisions regarding their land and their lives.

A WORD OF WARNING

The world's eyes were focussed on the Forest People by the Altamira Gathering. This is a very delicate yet opportune moment in their history - one for which they have been preparing. They have a strategy and various projects in place.

However, many leaders expressed their concern at the number of foundations, campaigns and projects they had heard about 'to save the Rainforest'. It is only occasionally that the people who actually live in the forests and experience the destruction are consulted or involved in such schemes. This often makes their work more difficult, particularly if these activities antagonise an already reactive government.

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The achievement of the Gathering is that many more people want to do something about the Rainforests. But the danger is that their good intentions may backfire at this time if they are not careful. The government is particularly sensitive now, so that it is even more imperative that the Forest People are consulted in order to avoid inadvertently putting an extra burden on them.

Various Indian leaders also remarked on the absence of Forest People on the committees of the various Rainforest foundations and projects. They noted that little money filtered to the projects initiated by the Forest People. In fact funds seemed to be used in campaigns in the North. As these did not involve the Forest People, they wondered how these campaigns could actually help the Rainforests or the people of the forests.

Outsiders must respect the fact that the people who live in the Rainforests have a long history of fighting to protect the forests. They must make it their business to find out what has gone before and see how they can fit in with the process already in motion, rather than impose their good intentions without due respect.

It is important that the leadership structures of the Forest People are acknowledged and that people work with their official organisations, such as the the Forest Peoples' Alliance, the Union of Indian Nations (UNI) or the Rubber Tappers Union. These structures have evolved specifically to protect leaders and to channel assistance and direction so that the whole movement is strengthened. There are times when highlighting one leader may jeopardise his position, yet other times when publicity may help. International groups must be sensitive to this, and must be continually flexible.

THE STRATEGY IS IN PLACE - THE TIME IS NOW

Working to protect the forests is an ongoing, life and death commitment for the people living in the forest, as Chico Mendes' assassination bears witness. The Altamira Gathering was a high point in a long process.

Chico Mendes of the Rubber Tappers Movement and Ailton Krenak, National Co-ordinator of the Union of Indian Nations, have worked hard to bring their people and other forest dwellers together in The Forest Peoples Alliance. Many difficulties had to be overcome in this process - and now Chico's death:

"Chico had a global vision and a great understanding. We feel an added responsibility to help the Rubber Tappers now and to continue to strengthen The Forest Peoples Alliance."

Ailton Krenak

The Second National Meeting of Rubber Tappers and a Meeting of the Peoples of the Forest was held in Acre, Western Amazonia, from 25th to 31st March 1989. Rubber Tappers, indigenous representatives, other riverine peoples and newly settled colonists from throughout the Amazon region of Brazil were present. Numerous representatives of the national and international press, labour unions, the environmentalist movement, political parties and government officials also participated. The main objective of the Meeting was to elect a new Directorship of the National Council of Rubber Tappers. It was also an occasion to solidify the alliance of Rubber Tappers and the indigenous peoples and to bring together a diversity of groups interested in, or directly affected by, the question of development in Amazonia.

The Declaration of the Forest People's Alliance at the end of the Meeting reads:

We, the traditional people who today mark the Arch of the Alliance of Forest People in the Amazonian sky, speak our will to keep our forest areas preserved. We believe that the development of the wealth of our people and our region must include the life of future communities. These areas must be defended by the whole Brazilian Nation, as a part of its pride and identity.

The Forest Peoples Alliance, which unites Indians, Rubber Tappers and River Dwellers, started here in Acre. It is spreading its arms to reach all willing to protect and preserve this huge but fragile life system - our forests, lakes, rivers and springs - the source of our wealth, our culture and our traditional base.

March 1989

This is a particularly pertinent time in the history of the Forest Peoples Movement because the Indian Nations are now able to participate in the political process. This will boost the strength of the Forest People enormously.

The Union of Indian Nations has been preparing for this moment and have their strategy and leaders in place. They are now ready to invite national and international participation.

However, they emphasise that they see this participation as a mutual process. While they need financial and often technical assistance, they in turn can help us to remember the natural laws by which all our activities are ultimately contained. Just as they do not say we should all go back to the forests (if there were any left), they wish for us to let them have the realistic freedom to live their lives the way they choose. Hopefully what we can learn from them is to respect that part of the planet on which we live and to choose a lifestyle that does not lead to the destruction of huge areas of the planet far away from our homes, where we can comfortably ignore the consequences.

We will have to realise that there is no development of one area at the expense of another in this great inter-related web of life of which we are all part. As Kayapo leader Payakan has emphasised:

"We are trying to save the knowledge that the forests and this planet are alive to give it back to you who have lost the understanding."

PROJECTS IN WHICH THE UNION OF INDIAN NATIONS
IS INVITING PARTICIPATION

* **Infrastructure**

The Union of Indian Nations (UNI) is working to include the needs of the 180 different Nations who are scattered throughout Brazil. This is a huge task, which requires an efficient and appropriate communications system. They have a radio programme which needs to reach a wider area. Other options for effective communication with villages in the forest need to be developed.

At the moment, they have only one telephone line and another will cost \$5,000! It is crucial for them to have more lines, so that they can respond to requests for assistance. A computer, modem and other office communication and recording equipment is needed to keep up with the increasing demands made of them. Any equipment or financial assistance would be greatly appreciated.

* **Legal and Other Advice**

The Union of Indian Nations needs to be able to employ advisers:

- . to ensure that the new constitutional policies regarding the indigenous people are properly implemented
- . to take up legal cases when the rights of indigenous people are infringed (of which there is a great backlog)
- . in order to participate effectively in the political process.

To this end, UNI has formed the **Nucleus for Indigenous Rights**, consisting of indigenous people, lawyers and other advisers. They are in the process of setting up an office in Brasilia, where they hope to employ three full time people within the next three months. They need funds to employ their advisers.

* **Regeneration Projects**

Over the last two years the Union of Indian Nations has been working on a strategy to assist the various Nations to reclaim their forests, their culture and their independence.

The elders are concerned that if their people do not eat the forest foods, they will not continue to have their traditional guiding dreams. Instead, if they eat the white man's food, like cows and maize, they will have cowboy's dreams and become destructive like the white man, needing more and more land for their cattle. They will become disconnected from the life of the forest and thus lose their humanity.

The Amazonian Rainforests consist of three different bioregions, prairie, upper Amazon (watery) and pre-Amazon. A Pilot Project has begun in each region with a village community. The elders have helped by collecting the different plant species which used to grow in the devastated areas. The original birds and insects will be attracted back once the forest has begun to regenerate. Then they will be able to bring the animals back into the forest.

With the help of a research centre, they will process some of the foods produced in such a way that they can sell them. As the forest is regenerated, so the ceremonies which are intrinsically woven into the cycles of the year will be invigorated. In this way, the primacy of the laws of Nature are re-affirmed and the sense of the interrelatedness of all life is sustained.

Thus the forest and its cultures are regenerated through the Forest Peoples' own integrity.

As soon as it is appropriate, people from the same bio-region will be invited to set up similar regenerative projects in their own villages, with assistance from the pilot project, the research centre and the Union of Indian Nations. Those involved expect the projects to replicate fast once the pilot is successfully under way.

The Forest Peoples' Support Group has committed itself to raise \$50,000 for part of one project. In order to bring the animals back into the area they will need to buy them in. These will then be bred and gradually integrated into the forest as it is reclaimed. It is for this that \$50,000 is needed over the next year. All contributions are welcome.

* **University Course and Research Centre**

a It has taken more than two years of negotiations with a university to set up special courses for Indian students, which include both indigenous and relevant technologies and knowledge systems. During this time ten students from eight different Indian Nations have been selected by their people.

The amount needed is approximately US \$3,000 per student x 4.5 years, ie. US \$13,500 per student to complete their full study.

- b A plot of land near the university has been set aside as a research centre for regenerative processes and appropriate technologies, and as the living quarters for the students. Approximately US \$60,000.

* **Exhibition of Kayapo Cosmology**

Some of the leaders of the Kayapo people, including Payakan Kayapo, worked together with Darrell Posey, a friend and scholar, to set up an Exhibition of their philosophy and way of life. This is currently at the Goeldi Museum in the City of Belem at the mouth of the Amazon.

The Exhibition shows, for example, their detailed observations of how seasons are announced by the constellation of the stars, the level of the river, the changing colours of the forest, the plumage of the birds - each element of Nature echoing to the others. A Kayapo diagram of a bee indicates how every part of its anatomy is named and described. There are over 30 names for the different parts of the bee, which to us is just this bee or that bee. The average ten year old Kayapo child can identify and name 60 species of bees. A room in the exhibition is dedicated to the Shaman's journey through various levels of consciousness which reflects an intimate knowledge of the way our minds can expand.

The Kayapo people would like this Exhibition to tour the world, as a way of showing how much is at stake when forests and ancient cultures are lost to the human family. Indeed the refined cosmologies of these people may well reflect back at us just how much we have diminished ourselves in our obsession with survival in terms of money, status and material security.

Any assistance in the task of taking this Exhibition on a world tour would be most welcome.

* **Other Forest Peoples' Projects**

- a) The **Rubber Tappers'** will be informing us of their projects and how we can support them once they have reorganised themselves. Meanwhile, there are two health projects for which they have asked support.
- b) The **Chico Mendes Foundation**, set up in memory of Chico and to support the Rubber Tappers, has urgently asked for funds to pay lawyers needed to ensure that Chico's murderers are found and tried.
- c) Some of the Indian people are working with the **colonists**, people newly settled in the Rainforests, to teach them how to farm sustainably. Funding is required for workshops and pilot projects.
- d) The **Malaysian Forest People** invited those involved with Rainforest issues to a working meeting in April. The Penan people of the Borneo forests (Sarawak) are being prosecuted for protecting their forests from loggers. They call for international protest and for a total ban on wood from Malaysia (further details are available).

* **Global Launch of the Pledge to The Forest People's Alliance, Brazil**

Both Payakan Kayapo and Ailton Krenak emphasise that it is the indigenous people who still hold the memory of humanity's primary relationship with Nature. That is why, at this time of grotesque and inhuman destruction of the planet, they feel it is the responsibility of the indigenous people to combine forces in protecting the equilibrium of the Earth.

"The vastness and aggressiveness of destruction means that we cannot walk like a turtle. We have waited for 500 years to do this, we cannot continue to argue gently for humanity. We have to develop the economic, political and technical strength to show that there are alternatives and to resist this catastrophic destruction.

We want to ask 5 million people around the world to give us a mandate to organise and to protect the forest for the world. If 5 million people give one dollar, that will not only be a financial contribution but it will remind people of their priorities. We want 5 million people to show that they are prepared to walk with us."

Ailton Krenak

The \$5m pledge will be launched simultaneously around the world in the next few months. This fund will be used to set up an efficient infrastructure and to support the projects of the Forest Peoples' Alliance, initially in Brazil and gradually incorporating the Forest Peoples of the world, so that they can communicate and work together.

THE FOREST PEOPLES' THINKING

"With the splitting of the atom everything has changed save our mode of thinking and thus we drift towards unparalleled disaster."

Albert Einstein

The Indian people are especially aware of the need for the Western mode of thinking to grow from its egocentric point of view to an inclusive perspective.

"We see it like this: It is as if we are all in a canoe travelling through time. If someone begins to make a fire in their part of the canoe, and another begins to pour water inside the canoe, or another begins to pee in the canoe, it will effect us all. And it is the responsibility of each person in the canoe to ensure that it is not destroyed. Our planet is like one big canoe travelling through time. The destruction of the forests is everyone's concern."

Ailton Krenak

Many Nations have a prediction which warns of a time when the planet will be dominated by 'non-humans' - those who destroy life. They see Western people as ignorant because they do not realise that they are profoundly violating life and thus themselves:

"The white people have separated themselves from each other and from Nature. They seem to believe they can exploit Nature in the most cruel way, as if her wellbeing has no relation to their own wellbeing."

Ailton Krenak

And, as Payakan Kayapo said when he visited Europe and experienced the frantic pace at which people live:

"You rush me from one meeting to the next as if I am a machine. You are mistreating me, just as you mistreat yourselves and the Earth.

You have lost your understanding because you are too busy to stop and listen. You do not hear any more. You are in danger and you are endangering all of us."

He observed that even those who were trying to 'save the planet' worked at this pace.

The Forest People have a great sense of urgency about the state of the world. They feel a responsibility to remind those people who are sensitive and willing to listen that nothing exists independently of anything else. This is why they invite everyone who is concerned to protect the equilibrium of the planet, wherever they live, and to walk with them in this commitment. In return those who make such a pledge will have an opportunity to imbibe a different way of seeing through the dialogue, stories, projects, videos and other materials which The Forest People will make available to their friends.

This Report was written on returning from the Altamira Gathering, after discussion with many different Indian Leaders. It has been approved by the Union of Indian Nations as a fair reflection of the situation.

Liz Hoske
March 1989.

Possible Appendix ?

I. UNI - UNION OF INDIAN NATIONS An Indian Organization

Founded in 1980, the Union of Indian Nations has a history of building alliances with Indian communities throughout Brazil. Its main concern has been to secure Indian peoples' traditional and basic rights. UNI has established contacts in most of the 180 Indian Nations in Brazil (approximately 220,000 people) and is often used as mediator in negotiations with the government. It also provides the different Indian areas and communities with information about legal matters that pertain to the preservation of their territories, cultures and traditions.

UNI is the only independent, national level, Indian organization to be established in Brazil. It has emerged as a result of the Indians recognizing their necessity to deal with the non-Indian society through the latter's own methods and channels.

Although Indian communities and nations have a strong internal organization, each of them has different levels and types of relationship with the national society. For this reason, UNI acts as an ally, being used as a resource for problem solving in each specific situation as requested by the communities. UNI is constantly working toward bringing the Indian Nations in Brazil in contact with each other. It fosters communication and provides a forum for different Indian groups to share experiences and confront together the problems that are common to all ethnic minorities in Brazil.

UNI has full copy.

THE GAIA FOUNDATION
AND
THE FOREST PEOPLES' SUPPORT GROUP

"We have to ensure that the equilibrium of the planet is maintained within the next ten years. The next generation of life on Earth is dependent on the choices that we make today"

Ailton Krenak
National Co-ordinator
Union of Indian Nations, Brazil

INTRODUCTION

The Gaia Foundation began its work in Brazil with Jose Lutzenberger, the father of Brazil's environmental movement, by raising financial and public support for his work.

We were later privileged to be introduced to the Rainforests by Chico Mendes. Chico is the world renowned Rubber Tapper who was assassinated in December 1988 for his commitment to protecting the Rainforests.

Since meeting Chico and Ailton Krenak, National Co-ordinator of the Union of Indian Nations, The Gaia Foundation has become increasingly involved with the Forest People. On consultation with other individuals and groups in the United Kingdom working on Rainforest issues it was found that none focussed particularly on the funding and support of projects initiated by the Forest People. The Gaia Foundation agreed to concentrate on such projects in close cooperation with others involved in these issues.

THE FOREST PEOPLES' SUPPORT GROUP

In December 1988, Paulinho Payakan of the Kayapo Nation in Amazonia visited London, calling for international support for a Gathering of Forest Peoples in February 1989. After his visit there was a meeting of individuals and organisations to discuss how people in the United Kingdom could best respond. The Forest Peoples' Support Group developed out of this meeting. The Gaia Foundation offered to provide this group with a base. The Forest Peoples' Support Group raised funds for the Gathering and organised a Celebration for the Forest People in London, to coincide with the Gathering.

Three people from The Gaia Foundation attended this magnificent meeting of Forest People. They returned with many more projects and an affirmed commitment respond to the initiative of the Forest People who are ready to invite wider international participation in their work.

The Forest Peoples' Support Group has attracted such an enthusiastic response that we felt it should be an ongoing project. For this reason it has been incorporated into The Gaia Foundation.

OUR COMMITMENT

The commitment of the Forest Peoples Support Group is "to work with the Forest People in protecting their cultures and their Rainforest home and to spread their message throughout the world".

When different leaders of the Indian Nations were consulted as to how best their people and forests might be served, they each emphasised the importance of strengthening the Union of Indian Nations and the Forest Peoples Alliance in Brazil. They also spoke of the need to build a network of Forest People around the world, so that they could 'walk together'. This would provide a strong protective web for the forests. It is for this reason that we have said we will follow their initiative and:

- . assist in strengthening the Union of Indian Nations (UNI)
- . help raise funds for the projects initiated by various Indian and Forest Peoples' groups
- . participate in launching the Global Forest Peoples Pledge
- . strengthen the Global Network of Forest Peoples and their projects.

PROJECTS

The Forest Peoples' Support Group is working on a number of projects:

Lectures, workshops, exhibitions, slide and video evenings on the Forest Peoples' projects and their way of thinking: To inspire us to reflect on our own culture and to realise how much we can learn from the Forest People.

Various Fundraising Activities: To raise both awareness and funds for the Forest Peoples' projects.

The Global Forest Peoples' Pledge: To invite worldwide participation in a pledge to support the Forest Peoples' Alliance of Brazil. Gradually this will be extended to include the Forest Peoples of the world. A global network of Forest Peoples' Support Groups is envisaged to ensure ongoing participation.

Liz Hosken
March 1989

**MATERIALS RELATING TO THE FOREST
PEOPLE AND THE RAINFORESTS**

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED MAGAZINES;

The Ecologist - Worthyvale Manor Farm, Camelford, Cornwall
PL32 9TT (0840 212711). Especially Forests issue: Vol.17 No.
4/5 1987.

Resurgence - Ford House, Hartland, Bideford, Devon (02734 293)
Especially No. 133, March/April 1989 issue subtitled "The
Wild Trees Will Win", with articles by Jonathon Porritt,
Jules Cashford, Herbert Girardet.

Link up - 51 Northwick Business Centre, Blockley, Glos
GL56 9RF (0386 701091). Especially Forests issue, Spring
1989. Articles on Rainforests and the endangered Earth by
José Lutzenberger, Jonathan Porritt, Peter Russell and Alan
Watson. (Lutzenberger's article is essential reading for
understanding the planetary significance of the Rainforests.)

BOOKS:

OTHER MATERIALS:

We are preparing **display boards, slides and videos** for people
who wish to inspire others to pledge their support to the
Forest People. We will continue to receive materials from
the different Forest People which will be available for all
concerned people to use for increasing awareness and raising
funds.

The **Education for an Awakening Earth Programme** (part of the
Gaia Foundation) is preparing video and other material on the
Teaching Stories of the Forest People. A video on the Tree
of Life is being developed. (Contributions of teaching
stories and poems or pictures of trees are welcome!)

ITEMS FOR SALE:

T shirts printed with Forest Peoples' Support Group Logo are
available from us in three sizes. Contributions ranging from
£5 to £10 per T shirt please.

Cards and Posters are being prepared, including quotations
from some of the Indian leaders. They will be available
shortly.

Forest Products are usually available for exhibitions and for
sale from both Malaysia and Brazil. The proceeds go to the
Forest People to help their cash flow. Presently there are
baskets from Malaysia and bracelets from Brazil.

POSTAGE:

When ordering any items from overseas, please make a
contribution towards postage.

VIDEOS:

The Altamira Gathering

* A 15 minute news story which went out on the Channel 4 "The World This Week" programme on 25th February 1989. It covers the issue of what is happening to the tropical forests and its peoples with particular reference to the Altamira Gathering.

* A 30-40 minute video showing the Indians arriving at the Gathering by boat, truck, bus and plane; the deep humanity of the Indian people and their campaign to shape their future in collaboration with national and international groups; the men and women giving speeches at the meeting itself and domestic scenes of the Indian people in their camp. The video will also look at the issues of the burning of the forests, dam construction, gold mining, logging and cattle ranching. (Available from Herbie Girardet, Nexus Productions, Top Floor, 24 Scala Street, London W1.)

* Other material is available from various sources on Chico Mendes, Payakan and the Penan People of Malaysia.

I WOULD LIKE TO TAKE UP THE FOREST PEOPLES' INVITATION

I would like to **pledge my support** to the Forest People in their commitment to maintain the equilibrium of the planet by protecting the forests around the equator of the Earth, and I enclose £1 (or more) as a symbol of my commitment.

I would like to **join the Forest Peoples' Support Group** and enclose a contribution of between £5 and £10 towards the costs of keeping me informed about events, projects, meetings and news for one year.

I would like to **join a Forest Peoples' Support Group in my area**, if there is one:

My area: _____

I would be willing to **start a Forest Peoples' Support Group in my area** and would like to discuss this with you. I am particularly interested in:

Raising awareness of the Forest Peoples' way of thinking by:

using their videos, slides, exhibitions, and written material

distributing their material to interested people

finding out more about the **Education for an Awakening Earth Programme**, in which the Gaia or holistic and Forest Peoples' view of the world is explored

Research and campaigning

Fund-raising

I would like to **assist the Forest Peoples' Support Group** in the following way:

I would like to assist the Forest People by **making a contribution** of £ _____ to the Forest Peoples' Support Group.

I would like copies of the Altamira Report entitled '**A Landmark in the History of the Forest Peoples' Movement**', at a cost of £2.50

I would like more information about **The Gaia Foundation**, to which the Forest Peoples' Support Group is affiliated.

I enclose a cheque for £ _____, payable to the Forest Peoples Support Group.

Name

Address

.....

.....

Tel: day evening

RAINFORESTS

- Their Survival and Ours

by Jose Lutzenberger



Climatologists and atmospheric scientists are unanimous today that the climatic irregularities that we are witnessing all over the world are the beginning of the so-called 'greenhouse effect'. They also make *linear* extrapolations: the prediction is that the world climate will slowly become warmer, that in 50 years or so it will be 2 or 3 degrees warmer. Perhaps I can add something more: it is true that the planet is probably getting warmer, and at the same time we could slide into an ice age in 10 to 15 years. It is true that the CO2 content is increasing and we know why. It is increasing not only because we burn what we call fossil fuels, but also because we destroy so many forests and we destroy soil humus, and so on. But there are other mechanisms of climate control that are also being affected.

Look at what happened to the ozone layer. For 20 years, climatologists and atmospheric scientists have been giving warnings about ozone depletions as a consequence of the introduction into the atmosphere of more than a million tons a year of CFC gases. But what they foresaw was a continued and uniform depletion within the next 50 years or so. And what happened? The ozone hole. It comes and goes every year, and most of the time it's getting bigger and bigger. Here we have what can be called a 'flip-over effect.' A sudden change, totally unforeseeable.

In chemical laboratories, when we analyse a substance and we have some of it in a tube, and we have the indicator... we add only one drop, and one more drop, and one more drop, and nothing happens, and nothing happens, and suddenly we get a turn-over, a flipping coin. We only know when it has happened and then it is too late. We only know about the ozone hole when it has happened. It was unpredictable, and now it is there, and

getting bigger every year.

On the western coast of South America, on the coast of Peru, something like that happened about a decade ago. Suddenly, for no reason that anybody could foresee, there was a flip-over. The cool current from the south is the Humboldt Current, which brought nutrients from deep waters and was responsible for the incredible proliferation of fish on the western coast of Peru. That's why we have those islands with the guano deposits, because for thousands of years birds such as pelicans and others have been eating the fish, and the fishing industry developed. Suddenly, that current was pushed back by a current coming from the north, a warm current which is poor in nutrients. Millions of birds starved miserably to death. And the fishing industry was gone overnight.

The sudden collapse of the Peruvian fishing industry was one of the causes that triggered part of the tremendous destruction in the Amazon today. The fishing industry of Peru was actually something totally indecent, because the fish, the millions of tons of fish that they caught were turned into fishmeal for cattle feed. Imagine, feeding cows with fish! However, this is what happened; and when the fishing industry collapsed, that opened the market for soya beans; and when the Brazilian government promoted large cash crops of soya beans in Southern Brazil, that was the end of our remaining sub-tropical rainforests in the state of Rio Grande de Sul, Parana, Santa Catarina, and now of the forest in Central Brazil.

The promotion and subsidy for big monocultures of soya beans: soya beans, not to feed hungry Brazilians, but to feed fat cows here in the Common Market. Cows that are producing what even the technocrats of the Common Market call the seas of milk and the mountains of

butter, where your tax money is used for senseless storage and subsidised sale, and sometimes giving it as a present to the Soviets. \$40 billion a year are spent to handle this excess of unnecessary food. Well, it was this policy, the policy of promoting cash crops in the South, that destroyed one of the most well-adapted, healthy, ecologically-sane peasant cultures that we had in the south of Brazil. Most of Brazil has big land owners, but in the south, due to German, Italian, Polish and some Jewish immigration we had a beautiful peasant culture that developed over the last 150 years. That was almost totally destroyed. Hundreds of thousands of people, maybe a million or so, lost their land, or they lost access to land, and these are the people who are now being driven into the rainforest.

You see, we have two warnings here: that things will not happen slowly and predictably. When they happen, they happen suddenly and then it is too late.

A common expression used by environmentalists to describe the rainforest is to say that the rainforest is the lung of the world. They use this image to say that the rainforest is the factory of oxygen for the earth's atmosphere. This is the wrong image, the wrong metaphor. First, lungs do not produce oxygen: they consume oxygen and produce carbon dioxide. But suppose we accept the image of the rainforest as a factory of oxygen without calling it a lung: it is still wrong. The rainforest, being an ecosystem in climax, produces exactly as much oxygen as it consumes. And the totality of life on this planet produces exactly as much oxygen as it consumes. And if this were not so, we wouldn't be sitting here. If the rainforest or the oceans had produced more oxygen than they consumed over the millions of

years, or even over a few dozen years, we would have an increase in oxygen concentration in the atmosphere. But the oxygen concentration has been stable for-- we do not know how many hundreds of millions of years -- at around 20%. If we had 25% of oxygen in the atmosphere, it would be a total disaster; the end of life as we know it. In an atmosphere of 25% of oxygen, even on a rainy day, a green tree could be set fire to if you hold a match to it; it would burn like paper.

So the rainforest is not the lung of the planet, it is something just as important. It is a colossal heat pump. Suppose we had something like the Sahara which is in the northern hemisphere in the place of the tropical rainforest in South America, this era could be an ice age; and Great Britain would be covered by a big sheet of ice as three quarters of it was over 10,000 years ago:

If we had a Sahara, a desert, in the place of the rainforest, then the planet would be cooler as a whole because all the energy that today is captured by the rainforest, or most of it, would be reflected back into empty space. Naked soil has a much higher albedo (*ie. the exposed soil's ability to reflect heat is much higher than the rainforest's - ed's note*). The rainforest is a sponge that picks up energy, absorbs it and recirculates it. So, the rainforest is a colossal heat machine. It absorbs all that energy and recycles it. Of the rainwater that falls on the rainforest, about 75% is put back into the atmosphere, into new clouds, within the first 48 hours: evapo-transpiration is up to 75%. Professor Salati at the University of Piracicaba in South Brazil has investigated where rainwater comes from, and he discovered that the rains that go down on the Amazon are recycled between 5 to 7 times. Of the rain that goes down on the giant trees in the rainforest, only 75% reaches the ground: 25% of the rain doesn't even reach the ground; the canopy has so much foliage that it absorbs about 25% of that rain, just by getting wet, and re-evaporating the rain into the atmosphere. Of the 75% that reaches the ground only one third, that is, about 25% of the total, ends up in the streams and rivers and goes back to the ocean where it came from. And even on its way -- it is a long way -- much of that water is re-evaporated into the atmosphere.

So actually evapo-transpiration should be a little over 75%. Of the 50% that

reaches the ground, all of it is pumped by the plants. So 25% stays on the leaves and is re-evaporated; 25% is taken away in the streams and goes down the rivers to the oceans; and 50% is pumped up and transpired by the plants. The sum of transpiration and evaporation is 75%.

When it rains on the eastern flanks of the Andes, it is water that has been recycled (across Amazonia) between 5 and 7 times. Clouds empty and reform, and empty and reform. So this is a fantastic energy recycling machine. When these air masses reach the slopes of the Andes the airstream splits, one half going south and one half going north. The part that goes north affects the eastern coast of North America and Northern Europe.

So, you see, if we had no rainforest, if we had naked soil, like we have in the Sahara, most of this energy would be reflected right back into empty space.

If the deforestation . . . continues increasing exponentially -- as it is now -- then by the year 2000 . . . about a million square kilometres will be gone. Last year . . . 210,000 square kilometres were gone - the UK is 250,000 square kilometres.

Salati calculated that the energy involved is equivalent to several tens of thousands of atom bombs a day. An incredible amount of energy!

Suppose the present rate of deforestation, which is heaviest in eastern Amazonia, continues. If the deforestation happening in the state of Para and Maranhao on the eastern plains continues increasing exponentially -- as it is now -- then by the year 2000 everything will be gone. About a million square kilometres will be gone. Last year, as you all may have read in the media, 210,000 square kilometres were gone - the UK is 250,000 sq kms. If this rate of destruction continues and this forest here in the eastern Amazon disappears, I see a danger of a flip-over affecting the Amazon as a whole. The forest might collapse.

The forest can collapse before we destroy more than 30%. By now we have destroyed about 20%. So there is a danger

that we don't even have to destroy the whole forest for it to go. It can collapse. When the east is bare, then -- in place of that fantastic evapo-transpiration -- we shall get hot air rising. The incoming clouds will dissolve, and it will not rain hundreds of miles further inland; it may rain only thousands of miles further inland: and the forest will start going dry and dying.

The rainforest cannot survive 3 or 4 months without rain. It has very superficial roots, contrary to what happens in the Savannah forest where small trees and bushes sometimes have roots going down about 15 or 20 metres. In the Savannah you can see everything beginning to flower at the end of the rainy season; suddenly everything is green. Even though the climate is dry, that vegetation has no water problem. In the rainforest, it is a different story; it has very very superficial roots. That is why the trees have those tabular roots in order not to fall over. When one of those giants topples you can see the flat bottom. These soils are incredibly poor; under the rainforest trees are the poorest soils in nutrients anywhere on the planet. This is one aspect where even great scientists were misled when they saw the luxury of the tropical rainforest. They thought that the soil that produces this incredible majesty of forest must be the richest soil in the world. In fact it is the poorest soil.

The rainforest survives by almost instantaneous recycling. The dead leaf that comes down from the canopy of the tree, falls on the ground and is almost immediately eaten up. The nutrients are not even allowed to go into the soil because under the heavy rainfall and constant high temperatures bacterial activity would be so strong that any nutrient that is in the soil would be washed away, would be lost to the system. The rainforest cannot allow any nutrients to remain in the soil for long, it must recycle them immediately. When you go into a temperate forest, you have a thick litter of dry leaves, and then you look into the soil, you get a dark, black soil with humus going down sometimes a foot, or three or four. In the rainforest, the litter is very thin. Leaves decay immediately, almost literally eaten up by the fungal roots that come out of the soil into the leaves. No bacteria -- almost no bacteria -- and no earthworms are in the soil. The



The above photograph and the one on page 12 were provided by the Friends of the Earth's Tropical Rainforest Campaign office.

litter is almost instantaneously recycled.

About 98% of nutrients are in circulation in the biomass. That's why we can have a thousand tons of green mass per hectare, and almost nothing in the soil. This is the only way the rainforest can survive.

The rainforest is incredibly vulnerable. You cannot do to the rainforest what you can do to your temperate forest. Once you have cut it down, 98% of nutrients are gone. This is why the people who settle in the forest can only survive by cutting down more forest everywhere. They know they are on a suicidal course.

Supposing I am driving in the middle of the night at high speed on a super highway. I know there is a precipice somewhere, but I don't know how far it is. Should I keep on speeding on the assumption that it is still very far? This is what we are doing today. We know the precipice is there, but we are still stepping on the gas. When we get to the precipice, it will be too late to stop.

There are specialists. Some of them look only at ozone; some of them look only at CO₂; others look only at the rainforest. But we must see the whole picture. If the rainforest collapses -- and that is a clear possibility -- then we could be faced with an ice age almost overnight. And this is something that politicians should be concerned about today.

So we must act, and action must come

first from the so-called First World. It is we, the consumer society people, who are the problem. It is our philosophy, our way of looking at the world. We must come back to an all-inclusive, holistic view of the world. The basic principle for an all-inclusive ethic is the principle of reverence for life, in all its forms and manifestations!

Under the rainforest trees are the poorest soils in nutrients anywhere on the planet.

This article was extracted from Jose's talk given at the Friends of the Earth's Tropical Rainforest Campaign Seminar which was held in December 1988.

Jose Lutzenberger was born in Brazil, of German parents. He read agricultural engineering and agronomy at the Federal University of Porto Alegre in Brazil and took further studies in soil science and agrarian chemistry in America. His first job in 1952 was with a local chemical company. Then in 1957 he began to work with the chemicals giant BASF in Germany. With them he travelled all over the world, particularly in South America and Africa, as a fertiliser consultant. Over the years Lutz became conscious of the "ever more brilliant" chemical fertilisers

and poisons described as pesticides, which the agrarian chemical industry was promoting. Increasingly he began to realise that the industry was profiting by curing the symptoms of diseases which in fact it, itself, was causing. By the time Lutz became aware of what was going on he was one of BASF's top consultants. The horror of what he foresaw compelled him to leave his job in 1971, and at the age of 44 he moved to Brazil with his wife and his two young daughters, to start afresh. Since then Lutz has been living according to his commitment. In essence he is concerned with regenerating the soil and its ecosystems, by fighting for "environmental sanity and social justice," which he sees as two sides of the same coin. Over these issues he has refused to compromise. After 17 years of dedicated campaigning and practical action, the dividend is finally paying off. Lutz is now well known and respected, both by his admirers and his adversaries, in Brazil and internationally. He sees his multiple approach as a holistic response to a whole world, where an intervention in any one area will affect the whole. His strategy is to respond to urgent calls, wherever people are ready to move and to act, rather than to theorize about which may be the best approach.

To help Jose Lutzenberger in his work, write to The GAIA Foundation (see Outside Back Cover).