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**BRAZILIAN MISSION
TO THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES**
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Nr. 69

Brussels, October 27, 1995

Mrs. Tamara Mohr
Coordinator for Latin America
BOTH ENDS
Damrak 28-30
1012 LJ Amsterdam
NEDERLAND

INSTITUTO SOCIOAMBIENTAL
data _____ / _____ / _____
cod. 10300035

Dear Madam,

Please find herewith, for your information, a text prepared by the Department of Environment of the Brazilian Ministry of External Relations, concerning a supposed increase in the number of "burning of forests" in the region of the Brazilian Amazonas. Also attached are graphics elaborated by the Directory of Control of the IBAMA (National System for Prevention and Fight against Forest Fires - PREVFOGO), as well as statistics on the burning of forests registered through satellite-supervision of sources of heat from June to October, during the period from 1990 to 1995.

Sincerely yours,



Jorio Dauster
Ambassador, Head of the Mission

■ IS AMAZONIA BURNING AGAIN? ■

Worldwide concern over the conservation of the Amazonian rainforest should take into consideration that deforestation should be described mainly in relative terms -- the sheer size of the Brazilian rainforest (1.7 million square miles), still making it the only big and rich primeval forest in the world essentially intact.

After a decade of misinformation, it is today vastly known that Brazilian Amazon deforestation rates plummeted down 50% between 1989-1991 -- reaching a rate of one third of what the national forests in the US were undergoing during the same period -- and continued admittedly to decline as the Government changed its land-use policies in 1988. Yet, stereotypes are hard to kill and we're still confronted to this date with preposterous charges of "burning one football field of rainforest per second", thus endangering the "world's lungs" and causing climate change (three pseudo-scientific fallacies in one sentence).

This year was an exceptionally dry one in Brazil. A lot of smoke was to be seen in what we call the "Amazonia Legal", that is to say a very wide area that comprises savanna ecosystems and our rainforest -- which remains so far mainly untouched by deforestation. A lot of smoke was also seen originating from neighboring countries.

Brazilian institutes weekly monitor vegetation fires in our territory with the help of the NOAA satellite images which depict *burning points* (data is available through INTERNET): the fires -- mainly in savanna areas (the Cerrado vegetation) or in pastures and agricultural land, but perhaps also in some scattered rainforest areas -- were, in the month of July 1995, more numerous than in July 1994. The other months of the dry season (June-October) remained within the pattern observed previously.

Was this a freak phenomenon -- essentially related to the seasonal burning of pastures and crop-land (the traditional practice, of indigenous origin, of "queimada" between crops) -- or would it correspond to real rainforest deforestation, which is in sharp decline since 1989?

The two phenomena are different and different are their environmental impacts.

As a matter of fact, the "queimada" practice itself has also been on the decline. The data for general vegetation fires in Brazil during the dry season for the 1991/1994 period show that they evolved from 467.012, in 1991, to 117.190 burning points in 1994. Even if, because of the surge in the month of July, the total of burnings in 1995 will be higher than in 1994, it still will be lower than previous years and conform to the lower pattern since 1991.

Usually, when there is fire in the primeval rainforest, it means that deforestation has already taken place, since that kind of vegetation is normally too humid to burn. Nothing authorizes, nevertheless, to draw the instant conclusion that a surge, in June-October 1995, of big smoke clouds in the skies of "Legal Amazonia" corresponds to a correlated increase in our rainforest deforestation

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rate. This can essentially be related, as it seems -- and we are waiting for the final actual scientific and field data, as the dry season draws to its end -- to increased activity in preexistent crop or pasture land

The "queimada" agricultural practice or the savanna indiscriminate fires, of natural or anthropogenic cause, mainly produces a lot of aerosols and particulate matter. It results in large clouds that admittedly could temporarily contribute to reduce -- similarly to volcanic eruption clouds -- the greenhouse effect. In fact they seem to temporarily cool local environment, CO₂ emission probably being of secondary effect in terms of the actual budget of its production, through burning, and its uptake, by accelerated sprouting of grasses and other vegetation in the tropical climate. The cloud forming phenomenon was the object of study of the Smoke, Clouds and Radiation -- SCAR-B project undertaken jointly by Brazilian and US scientists during the 1995 dry season, with the help of sophisticated equipment flown by the ER-2 NASA aircraft (a "cousin" of the high-flying U-2 spy-plane) and Brazilian aircraft and ground facilities

Extensive rainforest deforestation implies the reduction of biodiversity, the local alteration of its ecosystem, loss of primeval cover, the production of some amount of CO₂ by decay and the changing of the climax pattern of trees, among other factors. The relation of this phenomenon to the overall budget of CO₂ emission and of its uptake by the Amazonian rainforest, as well as its contribution to the long term accumulation of greenhouse-gas in the atmosphere, is currently being investigated by foreign and Brazilian scientists from the Center for Weather Prediction and Climate Studies -- CPTEC of the National Institute for Space Research -- INPE, one of the very few institutes in the world (3 or 4) which have the capability to generate climatic models, with the help of supercomputers we acquired from Japan in 1994.

As it is widely known, the whole world's tropical forests general deforestation contribution to the production of CO₂ is estimated to be of a fairly small amount (in the order of 10%), in comparison with other sources of anthropogenic greenhouse gas, in particular from the overwhelming and ever growing burning of fossil fuel in the Northern Hemisphere.

To suggest that some clearing of the vast Brazilian green cover "may contribute to the threat of global warming" is to beg out the really crucial question of abating per capita greenhouse gas emissions in the other Hemisphere -- as the world's recession is now over -- and meeting the Climate Convention's targets and timetables (or policies and measures, for that matter).

As for the role of rainforests as Carbon "sinks" -- notwithstanding the present scientific uncertainties concerning the overall process of climate change and CO₂ circulation -- it can safely be said that worldwide reforestation or afforestation in all areas available for it can only uptake, in numerical terms, a very small part of the present and historical emissions of CO₂ (we should remember that the concentration of greenhouse gas in the atmosphere is a very long term process of the order of 100 -150 years).

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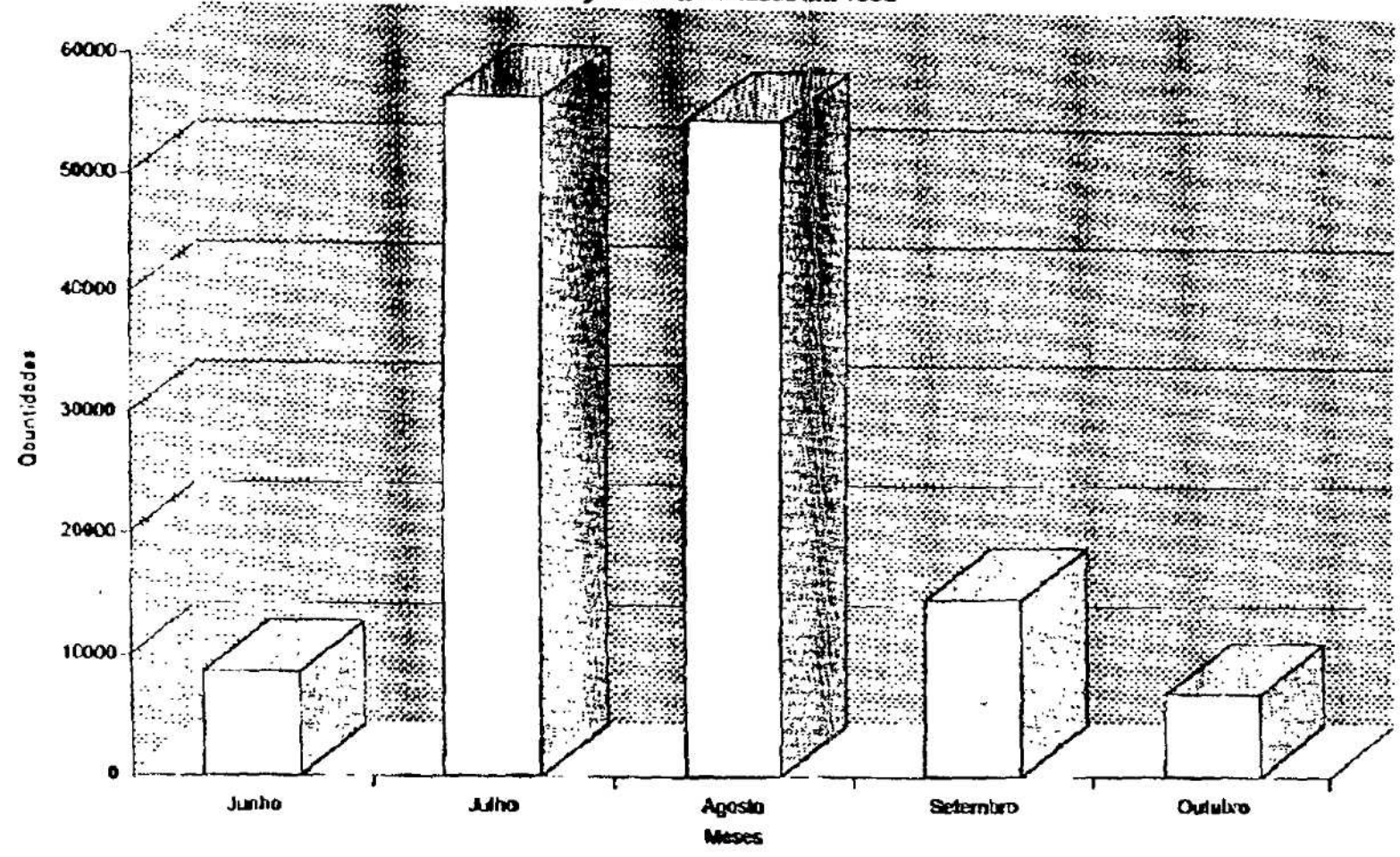
Extensive rainforest deforestation -- a phenomenon which does not occur in Brazil -- should be dealt with as what it really is, a potential menace to biodiversity. And the "queimada" burnings should be seen as what they always were, a somewhat primitive traditional way to clear fields between crops present everywhere around the world, whose benefits may be questionable in terms of modern criteria

INPE, which monitors general deforestation through LANDSAT and eventually SPOT satellites -- and whose data is now widely respected, after years of "clouds and mirrors" of misinformation from abroad -- as soon as it concludes by the end of the year its awaited and underway study on the Amazon for the 1992/94 period, will tackle 1995.

*In face of the recrudescence of fires, the Government anyway mobilized its forest services, which are being provided daily with satellite data, and started immediately to investigate these burnings and to take action accordingly. **It must be said that the present Administration has not reverted nor has the intention of reverting the land-use policies in Amazonia which resulted, since 1988, in the verified persistent and steep decline of rainforest deforestation.***

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Evolução das Queimadas em 1995



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Dados de Foco de Calor por ano
Fonte: INPE/PREVFOGO

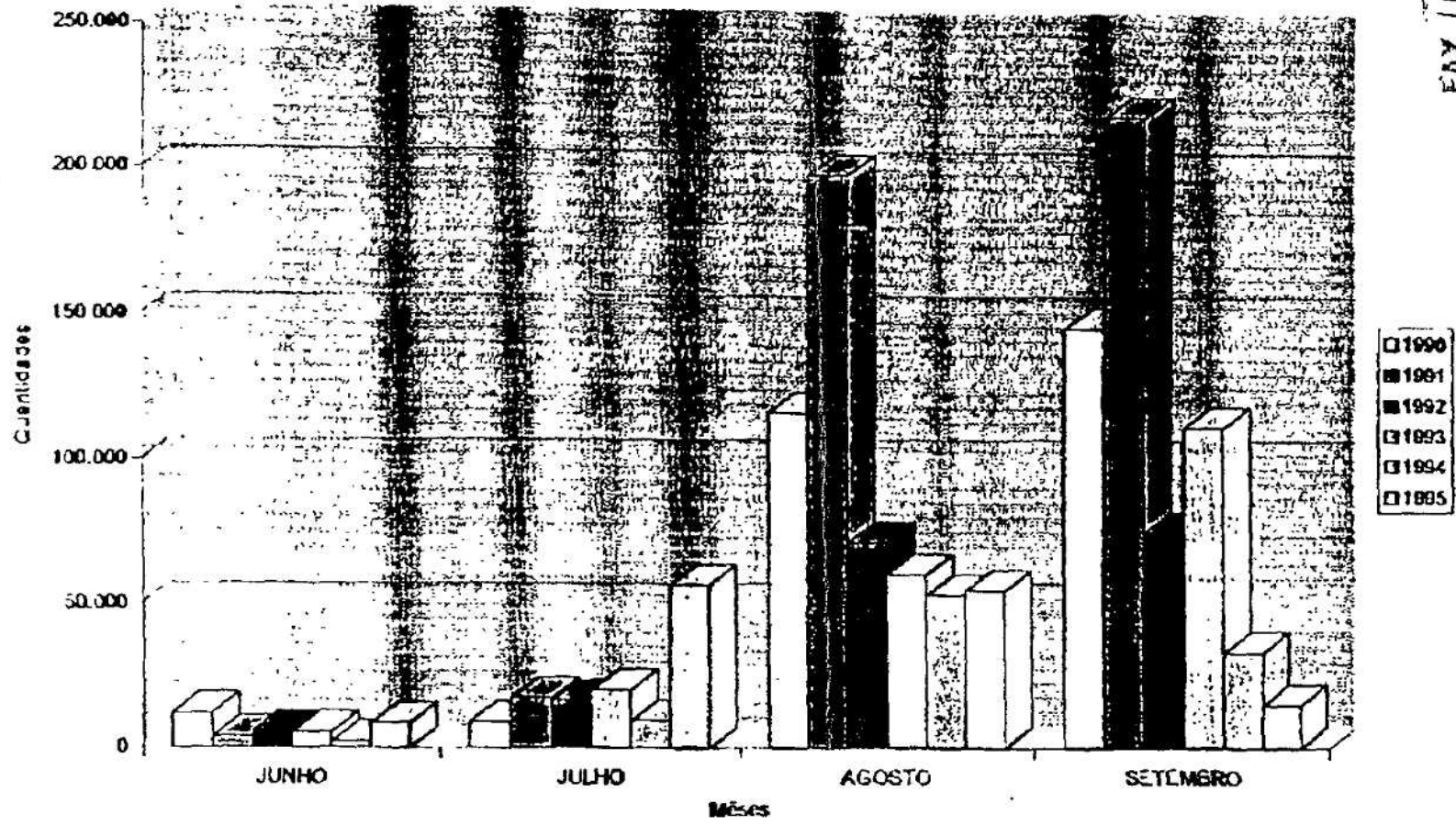
	JUNHO	JULHO	AGOSTO	SETEMBRO	TOTAIS
1990	12.020	8.968	136.847	146.824	283.857
1991	3.915	17.446	198.778	219.941	440.080
1992	8.751	18.543	71.600	75.184	168.078
1993	8.494	28.123	60.428	111.845	197.890
1994	2.254	9.263	53.214	33.187	97.918
1995	8.614	58.718	54.769	14.764	134.865

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21:30

20/12/95

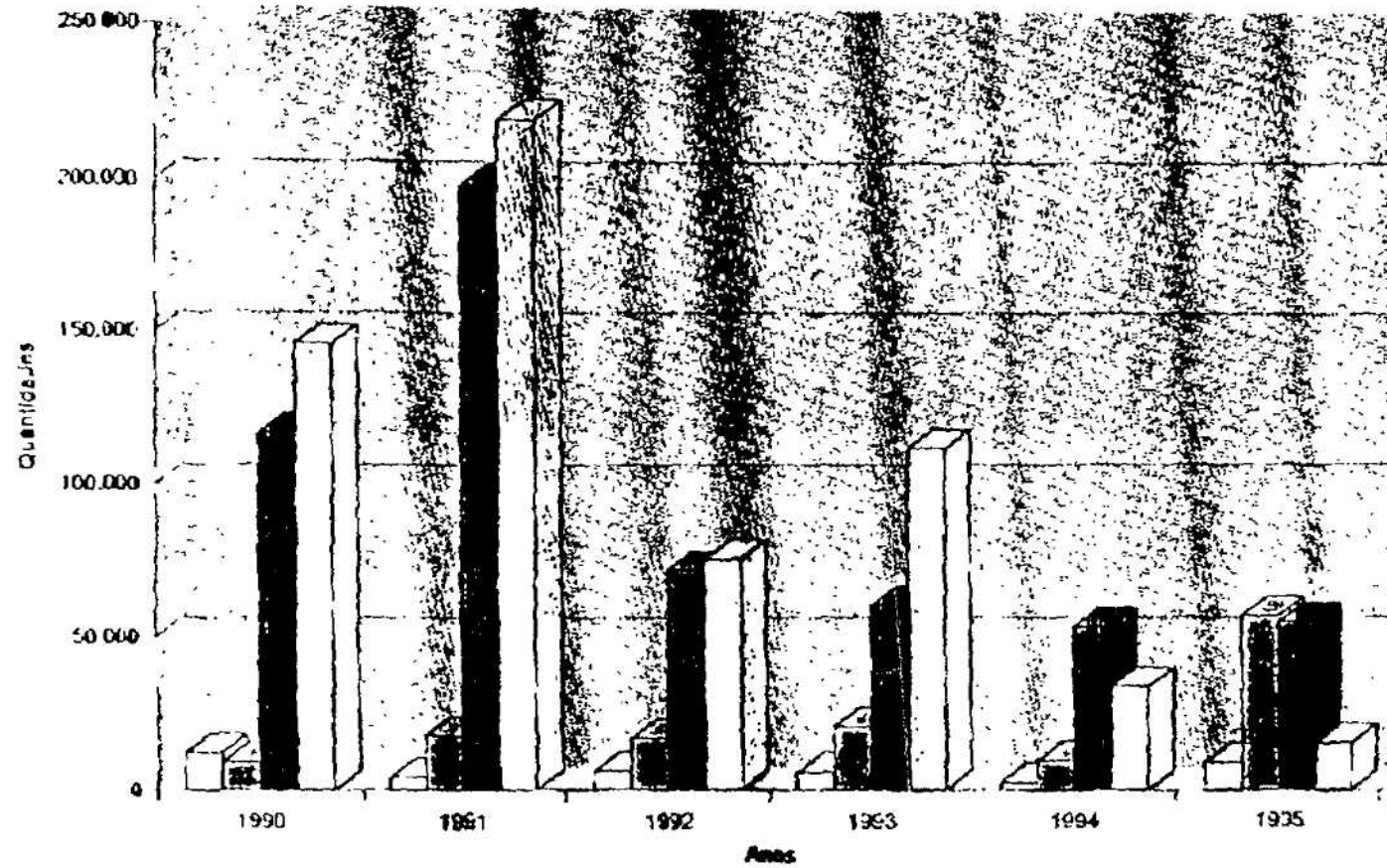
Evolução da Quantidade de Focos de Calor



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197 X 134
1991

- 1990
- 1991
- 1992
- 1993
- 1994
- 1995

Evolução de Focos de Calor



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□ JUNHO
■ JULHO
▒ AGOSTO
□ SETEMBRO

1077

21.76

25.10.95

Instituto Socioambiental
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Brasil

environment and development service for ngo s

Amsterdam, November 22, 1995

Dear Capobianco,

We received the enclosed document from Brussels as a reaction on one of our questions at the meeting in Brussels last September.

For your information.

Best regards,



Tamara Mohr
Both ENDS/coordinator Latin America

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