



Fernando Henrique Cardoso

No leniency for deforestation

According to the former president, there will be no solution as long as society is lenient toward environmental damage

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Former president Fernando Henrique Cardoso has been monitoring the environmental debate for at least four decades. After stepping down from his position as President of the Republic, he divides his time between lectures and special courses in US universities and the activities of his institute, (iFHC), which holds seminars on subjects that are of interest to society, such as democracy, development, political institutions, media, federalism – and, in particular, science and the environment. His connection with this issue dates back to the sixties and seventies. As a result of the political persecution that followed the military coup of 1964, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, then a professor and researcher, spent some time at universities in Chile, France and the US as a professor of sociology, his field of expertise.

While abroad, he spent time with some of the main players in the environmental debate, long before this became mandatory, such as Ignacy Sachs, Johan Galtung and Marc Nerfin. He was the president of Brazil in 1997 when the Rio+5 meeting and the Kyoto conference were held and was involved with other heads of state in the negotiations that led to the famous protocol. This document established deadlines, ranging from 2008 to 2012, by which the signatory countries undertook to cut their emissions of greenhouse gases.

In August of this year, Fernando Henrique opened the ceremony at which

the FAPESP Program for Research into Global Climate Change was launched. This is the greatest and most articulated multidisciplinary effort ever conducted in Brazil to increase knowledge about this issue. The former president explained how society progressively woke up to the fact that conserving the environment is important. At the request of Carlos Henrique de Brito Cruz, the Foundation's scientific director, he delivered a copy of the program to Ricardo Lagos, former president of Chile and currently an advisor to UN secretary-general Ban Ki-moon. In this interview, Fernando Henrique talks about the progress and acceptance of environmental issues in Brazil and throughout the world.

■ *Was the establishment of the Club of Rome (which brought together academics to discuss a range of issues, in particular environmental ones, back in 1968) the first initiative of people of significant standing within society to try to change matters in aid of the environment? How do you see those times?*

— In so far as I recall, yes it was. The idea of the Club of Rome was zero growth. This was incompatible with developing countries. Naturally, the Brazilian left-wing was against it. And so was I, of course. The idea at that time was that development was a central issue. The Club of Rome wanted zero growth because it believed that certain assets are limited. However, the common feeling was that everything was limitless – the air and

the sea would be available forever, no problem. There was no notion of limitation. One of the first people to develop this notion was Ignacy Sachs, a professor at France's School of High Studies of Social Sciences [EHESS – École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales]. He has always had great environmental concerns. Though perhaps, before him, Johan Galtung, a Norwegian, had already focused on the issue. He taught at Flacso [the Latin-American College of Social Sciences] in Chile. I also taught there in the sixties. I used to see him going into the lecture hall playing a flute. He'd been an assistant to Paul Lazarsfeld, a social sciences scholar.

■ *Where did Lazarsfeld come from?*

— He taught at Columbia, in the US. Galtung had worked with him there and was up to date; he knew everything. Once I attended a meeting in Sweden, in the seventies, at which we discussed how to put development and environmental conservation together. The concept of eco-development was developed, I believe, by Sachs. Subsequently another friend, Marc Nerfin, a Swiss who was the chief organizer of the 1972 Stockholm Conference, created the International Foundation for Development Alternatives in a town near Geneva. I was on the Board of this foundation.

■ *Were you in France at that time?*

— No, I was in Brazil. We had already established Cebap [the Brazilian Analy-



sis and Planning Center], but we had no means of survival. So I spent some time studying in France. I had been a regular professor there in the late sixties; I taught courses at the School of High Studies. During the seventies, I kept coming and going. In the mid-seventies I taught at Cambridge and spent some time at Princeton, in the US. Sometimes I went to Sweden.

■ *Did your interest in this issue appear as a result of these meetings?*

— It resulted from their influence. I remember a meeting in Canada, which has a foundation similar to FAPESP. A meeting was held there on the development and environment issue and its star was Sachs. He strongly influenced a lot of people here in Brazil. Sachs is Polish and lived for many years in Brazil; he has a home here and another one in France. He worked with Michal Kalecki, the great Polish economist, one of the major renovators.

■ *Did the concept of sustainable development start to take shape as a result of these discussions?*

— Naturally, this expression came later; it's more recent. But concern with environment-friendly development actually appeared after the Stockholm Conference. The turning point was Stockholm and, later, the 1992 Rio Conference. It was in Rio that an arena for governments to manifest themselves better was really provided.

■ *These mega-conferences that took place afterwards turned into something rather...*

— ... chimerical!

■ *Exactly. Don't they strike you as a huge marketing tool that lack effectiveness? Or, at least, that only work very slowly?*

— The governmental machine is always very slow.

■ *Everywhere?*

— Everywhere. Intergovernmental machines are even worse. At the end of the day, all themes that concern current affairs and political, social and economic thinking tied in with these conferences. For instance, the UN held a conference on racism in Durban, Africa. Nothing comes of it, let's say, but the subject is raised. Conferences have been held about women. And about the habitat, about cities. An administrative office was created. In other words, converting this into public policy may be difficult, because it depends on each country's government, but an intellectual environment is generated that enables ideas to become somewhat contagious. And in this sense I think it's positive. One of these UN initiatives yielded practical results. It was conducted by Amartya Sen, the Indian economist and 1998 Nobel Prize winner. He is married to Emma Rothschild, who was a great friend of Ruth's [Ruth Cardoso, Fernando Henrique's wife, who died in June of this year]. Amartya and Mahbub ul Haq, a Pakistani who was the president of Pakistan's Central Bank in the seventies, created the Human Development Index - HDI.

■ *Didn't you win a UN award because of this index?*

— Yes, in 2002. I was the first person to win the human development award because Brazil achieved the greatest improvements in these areas in the nineties. Had there been no HDI, we would've been unable to measure the progress of anything other than GDP-related items. It's a simple index that tracks per capita income growth, the extent of literacy and life expectancy. It was this which enabled the practice of evaluation to be disseminated. Here in Brazil, we adapted it for the João Pinheiro Foundation in the state of Minas Gerais, which assessed the HDI of towns, one by one. This resulted from this sort of debate, even though they seem to go nowhere. There was a meeting in Africa about the environment that Nelson Mandela and I attended and where we proposed – José Goldemberg came up with the idea and I adopted it – the target of all countries to produce at least 10% clean energy. Well, we aren't getting exactly this, but progress is being made. Brazil has advanced a lot regarding the conservation of forests. At the end of the day, this is an outcome of these conferences. However, it's a fact that action is always far more sluggish than one would like to see.

■ *You were against slash burning, but they continued doing it. Why is it so hard to get compliance with the president's wishes?*

— Actually, because one must go through channels that are more bureaucratic than political in order to succeed. Getting back to the slash burning example, I'm very friendly with Fábio Feldman [environmentalist and former federal congressman]. We created a council on global warming. We were the first country to do this during my term.

■ *During your first or your second term?*

— Second. I was the council's chairman and Fábio, its executive secretary. We held a few meetings to clarify matters to ministers, secretaries, governors, etc. regarding the issue. And Fábio used to drive me crazy in connection with slash burning. He always looked at me to complain: 'They're burning more than they say...' On that occasion, we managed to build a satellite with China, the first to take pictures over the Amazon Region several times. That was in my first term. Back then, you could already figure out what was being burnt. But this only increases one's anguish, because you know what is burning but lack the means to put a stop to it. That region

is huge, local interests are very strong and there's no effective policing... Today, at least, the mentality of the region's governors has changed a lot.

■ *In which states of the Amazon Region is preservation greatest?*

— Amazonas and Amapá are preserved. Not the south of Acre, though. The forest is attacked from the south because the population puts pressure on it. There are very strong pressures there. First from the lumberyards, which pay the Indians to fell trees and sell timber. Then there's pressure from local governments, as they profit from timber exports. And there's pressure from small farmers, in so far as population displacement occurs. I was recently reading in newspapers that it is Inkra [the National Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform] that conducts the settling of farmers over there. At the time of the military, only large companies, the multinational ones, were strong players and cut down forests. And the government offered incentives for them to do so.

■ *To advance deeper into the country.*

— They wanted plantations and pastures in the Amazon Region. I have a book about the region at that time, *Amazônia: expansão do capitalismo* [Amazonia: capitalism expansion, published by Brasiliense/Cebrap], dated 1977. I went there with Juarez Brandão Lopes, a professor from USP [the University of São Paulo], to conduct an occupational research study in the Amazon Region. The book wasn't written with him, but with Geraldo Müller, who was my advisor, and with the help of Tetê [Teresa Marta], Marta Suplicy's sister. Severo Gomes [businessman, former senator and former minister, who died in 1992] was my friend and had a farm in the south of Pará. We went there and I thought it was all rather weird, because they asked for documents and permits, and there were soldiers. Severo received us and, in the evening, the region's bishop, whose name was Cardoso, a Dominican from the state of Minas Gerais, and a senior nun from a convent over there came to dine with us. Talking to them that evening we found out that there were guerillas in the country. And we didn't know about it.

■ *Given all your dealings with the left, didn't you know about the Araguaia guerrillas?*

— No, nobody in Brazil knew. That was back in 1975. Severo, Juarez and I had gone all over that region... Later, when I returned, there were wounded soldiers

on the plane. But this story is just a detail. I went there to do research. We called the people from the area to talk. Capitalism was penetrating over there. There was a "cat" – which is what the guys who co-opted labor were called – who decided I wanted to buy land. He said "Don't you worry; buy the land, because over here, we'll look after everything for you. There's a system: the folks cut down the woods and stay there for 15 days. Then they go back to town, spend three or four days, and return to the woods. They can't take guns or women, and they can't drink. If they do any of that, we give them an alcohol injection and they'll never do it again." He was talking about the peons that were co-opted, mainly in Maranhão. I visited a village called Redenção. Today it has, I don't know, about 100 thousand inhabitants, it's a city. It had brothels and a drugstore to draw people. That was the idea at the time.

■ *All of this with a tax break?*

— Of course. There was the Volkswagen farm and those of other multinationals. And of course, all of that was going to turn into a desert. You cut the trees down, the cattle stampede the land and it doesn't turn into anything. This kind of government measure, encouraging deforestation, has ended. However, the fatal capacity for controlling deforestation

is still small. How is this measured? By satellite. We have Inpe [the National Space Research Institute] to do this. Then there are those who analyze the data. There was always a discrepancy between the true figures and the official figures. Once I went to dinner at the house of Ronaldo Sardenberg, my last Science and Technology minister. I had dinner there with Fabio, and a young woman who was his friend and who knew everything about the Amazon Region, and the person in charge of the satellite work and the analyses, to see if we could figure out what the correct slash burning and deforestation figures were. It's very difficult. Even as president, even when you want things, there is no guaranteed set of tools. And it's no use the government wanting to solve everything: it must be done by society. For as long as society is lenient about these matters, there will be no solution. Today we see that deforestation is still advancing. My position is zero deforestation. But there are always some interesting initiatives. We held two meetings at the Getulio Vargas Foundation in São Paulo and I was favorably impressed with the Brazilian cement and steel businessmen's efforts. They're all trying to control CO₂ emissions. Our responsibility regarding global warming is slash burning. The feces of animals, of cattle, which also produce methane, is another factor. But the bulk of it is not industrial. The problem is burning the forest. And nothing can justify that.

■ *Capitalism at the time when you wrote Amazonia was far more savage than today's, right?*

— I think so.

■ *How can this process be controlled?*

— There is more than enough advanced capitalism. But right now we're witnessing the melt-down of all stock markets... Capitalism has always had this irrational component, it's true. But not that irrationality that we were talking about before. That kind is savage. As is what China has now. If society has no conscience, if it exerts no pressure and has no government, the sources of private interest destroy everything. There must be an instrument of counterbalance, plus regulation. The worst thing is when the State offers incentives that go against nature, which was the case at the time of the military. At that time there was no awareness; now there is. In the state of Amazonas there was a governor, Gilberto Mestrinho, who hated the nature conservation issue.



If society lacks awareness, doesn't bring about any pressure and has no government, the sources of private interests destroy everything

I met him in the Senate. He believed in the power of unfettered progress. His attitude has now changed.”

■ *It changed?*

— It did. Amazonino Mendes, another Amazonas governor, also changed. The current one, Eduardo Braga, is totally concerned with this issue, at least verbally; I don’t know what he’s actually doing. I introduced him to Al Gore when he was here. João Alberto Capiberibe, from Amapá, is also concerned. Today, the State is far more aware of the need to offset the more savage forces.”

■ *Intergovernmental issues seem to pose a greater difficulty, as you mentioned. The Bali Meeting in 2007 indicated that today’s challenge is to try to combine the interests of both the poor and the rich countries.*

— There is no easy solution. But Brazil’s delegation over there, as far as I know, achieved a reasonable solution during the discussions on forest conservation. I think that we should absolutely insist on the value of standing forests and even of planted forests. This was never taken into account when we discussed the Kyoto Protocol originally. I think that that Kyoto has become insufficient. The protocol’s idea was shared and unequal

responsibility. An arrangement was devised there whereby developed countries can continue polluting provided they pay for the non-pollution of others. This is rather archaic, to imagine that we can accept that nobody has the right to pollute with no attempt at compensation. I always remember [Mikhail] Gorbachev, because I was very impressed by his position in the eighties.

■ *And what was that?*

— He was the leader of a communist state, a world power based on atomic production, who said: ‘Look here, we can’t go on like this.’ I think that theoretically this is very interesting. In Marxist theory one can’t talk about Humanity without a degree of mystification: everything indicates that there will only be Humanity when a universal class comes into being. When the workers rule the world, everyone will be equal. Then we’ll have Humanity. Other than this, what we have are social classes. Humanity is mystification and opposing social classes are what concretely exist. These are [Karl] Marx’s ideas. Or, above all, the ideas of Marx’s disciples – Marx was always more intelligent than his disciples. Gorbachev said the opposite: ‘We can’t go on like this. Atomic terror is no solution; having an atom bomb

not only hurts others; it all goes into the atmosphere and comes back to me. We must think that it’s a process that affects Humanity.’ I think this, in the late eighties, was a huge change. This evolution is very interesting, because in the tradition of leftist thinking it doesn’t exist. The idea of progress dates back to the 18th century. It’s the belief that progress is unlimited and that one needn’t think about the limits that nature imposes. Man would always discover a new technology to solve it all. It’s a blind trust in technological progress. Then Gorbachev came along and said ‘Look here, think about this, be careful, because progress can be destructive.’ So we must have other values, including respect for the environment.”

■ *Was Gorbachev aware of this concept?*

— I met him several times. He has a relative awareness of this. But it’s hard to really tell, because he speaks no English, only Russian. He’s very talkative, very pleasant. And he has a good-looking daughter who translates well, besides the official translator. Still, interaction is complicated. Perhaps he doesn’t have a conceptual awareness, let’s say, of what he said and did. And he’s not a person with such an abstract thought process. But I know he did engage in this conceptual change. Today, the ethical theme in science has made a comeback. Science has become less arrogant. Will it solve all world problems? No.

■ *We recently witnessed major debates about genetic modifications and embryo stem cells.*

— It was good, wasn’t it? Of course, research must be conducted, but there are limits. That’s also true of the development and environmental issues. I think that social awareness has advanced. I see that young people show a lot of environmental sensitivity. Brazil has always held, at least where rhetoric is concerned, advanced positions about the environment. Lately that has slackened off a bit. We’re back to a ‘growth is what matters’ type of situation. Environmental concerns have been rather set aside due to growth ambitions.

■ *You have always been critical of energy from nuclear sources. Wouldn’t that be a good solution today?*

— The problem is disposing of atomic waste. However, given current circumstances, we must rethink this. I was heavily struck by a conversation I had with people from Alcoa. They’re injecting gas into holes where there was oil before. In-



stead of releasing it into space, they're putting it under the ground. Something akin to this will have to be invented for nuclear waste. More than 60% of France's power is atomic energy. Germany and Spain can afford the luxury of turning this down because they import power from the French. That makes it easy.

■ *We interviewed professor José Goldemberg a few months ago and he was critical of Brazil's current diplomatic posture. He said Brazil is playing China's game and that it could hold a far more proactive position. How do you see this?*

— I agree with him. Indeed, Brazil's diplomatic posture was heavily underscored, understandably, by the seventies' economic boom and a vision of a powerful Brazil. Regarding the environmental issue, I myself forced the discussion in favor of the Kyoto Protocol. I talked to Bill Clinton (he called me on more than one occasion during negotiations), to Sardenberg (when he was in Holland, negotiating the issues) and to our diplomatic corps... Well, diplomacy more or less goes along with politics when this is convenient. As it is doing now, in the case of Lula. He has fewer environmental concerns and is more interested in growth; diplomacy has sort of taken up an attitude derived from the struggle of the poor against the rich. They aren't third-world advocates; I'm exaggerating, but there's an element of this. China is part of the Third World, the US and Europe are in the First world; so we're together with China, we're not in the First World. Well, I think this is a simplification. And so do they. For instance, the ambassador who has always dealt with this, Everton Vieira Vargas, is very good. There are several like him at Itamaraty [the Brazilian Foreign Office]. But there are others that think otherwise. If China prefers things over here, they establish an alliance with China. I think we shouldn't maintain unconditional relations with anyone. We must consider our interests and the interests of Humanity regarding profit. China will have to take measures, because it knows it can't go on with things as they are at present. Brazil pulled away from it a bit in Bali, but it must pull away further, because we don't need to pay for their mistakes. China decided to grow and it has a problem. I can understand it: one billion people need to eat. But now that they're eating, they need to pay more attention to how things are done. And Brazil isn't China. We should understand these processes. In any event, we have made fair progress regarding such matters."



Brazil pulled away from China a little at the Bali meeting, in 2007, but it needs to pull away further because we don't need to pay for their mistakes

■ *Are you still a critic of the waste of energy?*

— I think not wasting it is fundamental. We can gain a lot more.

■ *Is this a trauma from the time of the nationwide power shortage?*

— No it's not. It's about seeing what happened and how we managed to handle matters. We developed capabilities and learned to save power. Only recently did the level of power consumption return to its former levels. There's a lot to be done, a lot of things left over.

■ *You gave a copy of the FAPESP Program for Research into Global Climate Change to Ricardo Lagos, the former president of Chile. Why?*

— He's an advisor on the environment to the UN secretary-general. I used to chair the Madrid Club, an association of former presidents founded by Gorbachev. Clinton was its honorary chairman. We held a major meeting on how to render fighting terrorism compatible with democratic rules. When Ricardo left the government of Chile, I transferred two of my duties to him: the chairmanships of the Madrid Club and of the Inter-American Dialogue, in the US. And he, in turn, held a meeting on the environment. I gave him the FAPESP program to take to the UN and to the Madrid Club itself.

■ *Can one expect some receptiveness from these institutions?*

— Receptiveness yes; money no. It's mainly to publicize the program. We have resources in Brazil. So the problem is getting people interested, to show what can be done.

■ *And what about the environmental issue, in the light of the current major economic crisis?*

— The crisis will have a positive impact on the environment because it will reduce growth and pollution. But a greater effort to understand the issue won't necessarily occur. The crisis will just reduce the magnitude of the drama. One will spend less, consume less oil... In the US, there was major progress, and at the social awareness level as well. In California and in other states and cities, for example. Brazil works a bit like that. We aren't a centralized country. We have states and municipalities, a more active society, as in the US. There, the federal government lacks the power to curb the California governor. I think Brazil is able to do the same. I was very impressed at a meeting of the WRI [World Resources Institute], of which I am a member, along with Al Gore. There was a presentation about what was happening in American companies. They're much more advanced than the US government. And some of ours are as well. Talk to the Votorantim people to see this. They're proposing to change their type of blast-furnace in order to cut the emission of greenhouse gases.

■ *Are you asked to deal with this theme at your institute? The iFHC website lists several seminars on this issue.*

— A lot of people ask for this. At first it was difficult. I used to be the president of the Republic and am the honorary chairman of the PSDB [political party]. So they thought that the institute was going to work as a politician's disguise. But it doesn't. To this day, I have difficulty in this regard. I'm not that well informed about day-to-day politics, but people don't believe it. They think I'm putting this on, that I'm maneuvering – well, sometimes I am. But I no longer have patience with this type of thing and personal interest in it. Here at the institute we try to maintain a debate with society. And, in so far as possible, with the parties as well. In our seminars, we make an effort to get people from universities and companies, journalists and politicians. The difficulty is finding politicians interested in these subjects." ■