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2006 Goldman Environmental Prize Recipient for South and Central America

Tarcísio Feitosa da Silva
Altamira, Brazil



"He is the one in touch with the outside world, making the link between the traditional river-dweller communities and the national environmental movement in Brazil. He is the lynchpin at the local level." - Stephen Schwartzman, co-director of the International Program, Environmental Defense.

Creating a Mosaic of Protected Lands in the Amazon

In a lawless, remote, northern region of the Brazilian Amazon, where land grabbing and illegal logging are destroying communities and the environment, Tarcísio Feitosa da Silva leads a grassroots coalition to protect the tropical forest and the people who live there.

Working with local organizations, Feitosa revealed massive illegal logging and human rights abuses. Their work prompted the government to protect a mosaic of tropical rainforest areas that, together with existing indigenous lands, make up the world's largest area of protected tropical forest, bigger than the state of Minnesota.

The 240,000-square-kilometer area includes the Verde para Sempre Extractive Reserve, the Riozinho de Anfrizio Extractive Reserve, the Serra do Pardo National Park, and the Middle Lands Ecological Station.

Working in a Deadly Environment

Feitosa, 35, has spent more than 10 years fighting for human rights, environmental protection, and sustainable development in the Xingu and Middle Lands of Pará, some of the most remote areas of the Amazon. He works with the Pastoral Lands Commission, the social justice arm of the National Conference of Bishops (of Brazil), and is one of the elected leaders of the Movement for the Development of the Transamazon and the Xingu (MTDX), several of whose leaders were assassinated in recent years. In February 2005, Sister Dorothy Stang, an American nun who worked in Pará alongside Feitosa, was murdered.

Feitosa has documented illegal logging activity, and in one high-profile action, tipped off government officials who raided the logging sites, seized 6,000 illegally felled mahogany trees, and sold them at auction to raise \$1.5 million to create a fund supporting sustainable development and conservation efforts. Feitosa also helped organize a protest in which community members linked their boats to barricade the mouth of a major river, blocking barges carrying illegal logs. They were able to seize about 2,000 logs.

Seeking Environmental Justice in Remote Regions

Feitosa's work is carried out in an extremely remote area that is a two-day boat ride from the nearest significant town. The northern state of Pará encompasses more than one-quarter of the

country's Amazon and boasts extensive unspoiled forested regions and freshwater river beaches. It also is home to many traditional and indigenous communities that live in almost total isolation from the outside world.

But starting in the 1970s, the government began to build roads through the Amazon to Pará, bringing in thousands of settlers. Pará now is one of the deep Amazon's most lawless and environmentally threatened regions. Land grabbing, uncontrolled deforestation, illegal logging, and fires are rapidly destroying and degrading its forests. Logging has affected Pará more than any other region of the Amazon, resulting in the loss of one-fifth of the state's tropical forest cover. Together, Pará's deforested areas are about equal in size to the state of Colorado.

The Brazilian government has begun to pave the last 1,174 kilometers of road connecting Pará to the rest of Brazil. Without controls or protection, this road will open one of the final intact swaths of the Amazon to expanded cattle ranching and soy production, easier access for loggers and a greater influx of settlers who will set more fires to clear forest for their crops. In the Amazon, deforested areas receive less rainfall, and the plants and trees retain less moisture. As the area dries, the entire region becomes more susceptible to widespread forest fires like those in 1998 that engulfed much of the Amazon, and to droughts like the one in 2005 that left many Amazon tributaries completely dry, fish dying in the sun and many communities stranded and hungry.

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Recipient Quote:

Name in print: Tarcísio Feitosa da Silva

"Here in the Amazon we have the greatest corridor of protected areas in the world. This is important to guarantee the lives of the human populations that depend on the forest to survive and to give continuity to the forest and its resources. The municipal, state and federal governments of Brazil should now assume their clear role in protecting these forests."

About the Goldman Environmental Prize

The Goldman Environmental Prize allows individuals to continue winning environmental victories against the odds and inspires ordinary people to take extraordinary actions to protect the world. The Goldman Environmental Prize was created in 1990 by civic leaders and philanthropists Richard N. Goldman and his late wife, Rhoda H. Goldman.

The Goldman Environmental Prize winners are selected by an international jury from confidential nominations submitted by a worldwide network of environmental organizations and individuals. Prize winners participate in a 10-day tour of San Francisco and Washington, D.C., for an awards ceremony and presentation, news conferences, media briefings, and meetings with political, public policy and environmental leaders.