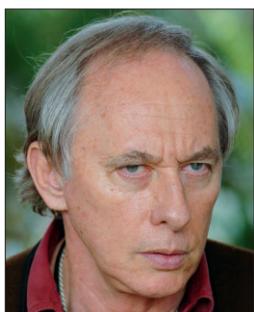


# We have been doing our homework

By CARLOS MINC

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CARLOS MINC has a Master's Degree from the Technical University of Lisbon, and a doctorate from the Sorbonne. A student leader, he was exiled by the military government. Returning in 1979, he founded the Brazilian Green Party, serving for many years in the Rio de Janeiro State Legislature. Joining the Worker's Party, he became their leader in the Legislature. He was appointed The States' Environmental Secretary in 2007, and became the Federal Minister for the Environment the following year.

Brazil's Iguaçu Falls: The country's hydroelectric potential is, unsurprisingly, amongst the highest in the world

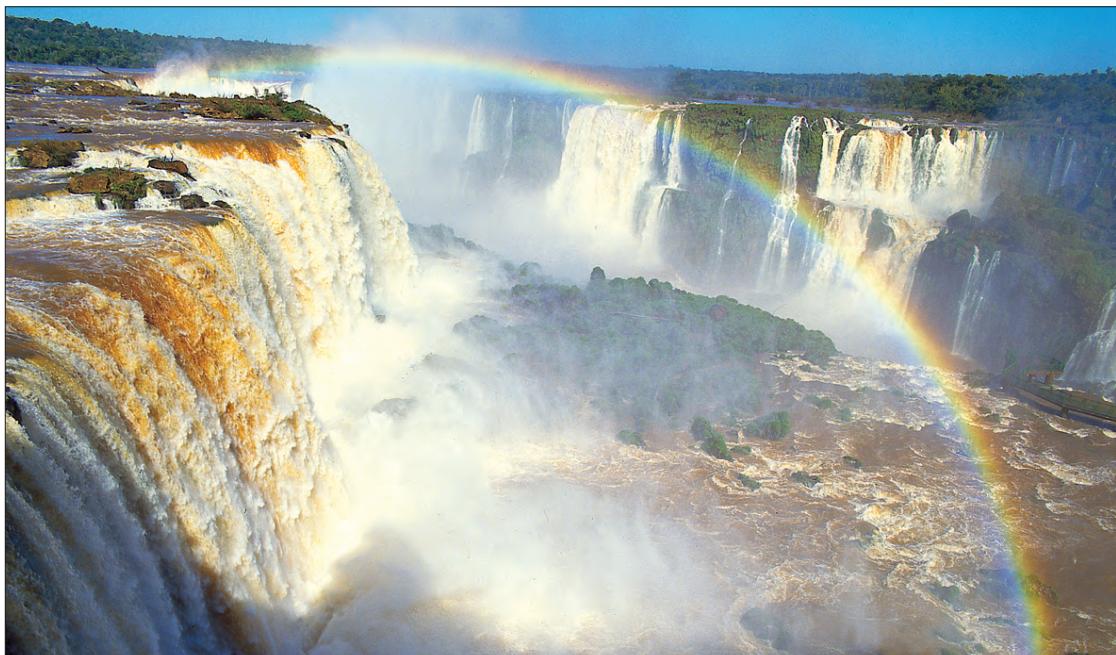
**E**ven those who are only minimally concerned about the future of the planet are counting on a responsible result from the Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen. Divergences between rich and developing countries, which are nearly always of an economic nature, urgently require pragmatic solutions. No economy can grow or even survive in a scenario of worsening greenhouse effect and global warming. Climate change, desertification, biodiversity loss, and their impacts are issues that extend far beyond the label of being 'environmental'. What we are discussing here is the immediate need for trillion-dollar investments in adaptation and mitigation measures. Climate change is not something we can afford to involve in a naive aura of romantic defence of the environment.

Those who are going to take part in the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP-15) certainly have in-depth knowledge of the reach of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC's) projections. They are all aware of what is at stake. Discussions on whether such projections will be confirmed or not lose their strength day after day. The question is no longer about the consequences of a 2°C increase in global temperatures by 2100, but rather about what countries will be able to do with regard to

impacts on populations and economies worldwide.

Brazil has demonstrated determination and ability to deal with the issue within its territory. Even though the Kyoto Protocol did not establish targets for the country, we have implemented an ambitious greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction programme that delivers the equivalent to the commitment settled for the developed countries that participated in negotiations in Japan. We are going to remove 4.8 billion tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere by 2018; for that purpose, we have already reduced deforestation in the Amazon region by 46 per cent in the past 12 months. By the end of the year we will have confirmed the lowest deforestation rate of the last 20 years. We are also working on several fronts to reduce industry emissions, eliminating CFC and HCFC emissions and negotiating with productive sectors and civil society, in an attempt to engage all in our endeavours. The challenges are enormous and the sacrifices, inevitable.

The aim of our reductions has always been fighting deforestation in the Amazon region, which represents a third of our territory, and there assuredly will be an 80 per cent fall in deforestation rates by 2020. But now even that is under review. This year the Ministry of the Environment is going to expand monitoring of sensitive biomes like the Cerrado and the Caatinga, which despite



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having lower potential for emissions have systematically increased their contribution to the greenhouse effect. We have devised the PP-Cerrado Action Plan to prevent and control deforestation and wildfires in the Cerrado biome, along the same lines of the action plan that has been responsible for successive declines in degradation in the Amazon region.

All of this, however, does not mean we are giving up on economic development. On the contrary, we are combining public preservation and conservation policies with policies on economic growth and welfare. Environmental licensing processes, which are required to lower environmental impact, especially in large-scale construction projects, have become more expeditious and have made the expansion of energy supply feasible. In 2008, the number of granted licences increased by 27 per cent compared to the previous year. At the same time, we have approved laws that require that energy generation models which are proven to cause large-scale emissions, such as thermal power plants, for instance, plant thousands of trees as a way to mitigate their impact. We are encouraging the production of cleaner energy, even though we already have one of the cleanest and most efficient energy mixes of the planet. Specific taxes will be reduced to foster the construction of wind farms. We are building houses with solar water heating for low-income sectors of the population. All of this certainly makes Brazil one of the major world protagonists in the environmental debate.

For over a year and a half at the Ministry of the Environment, I have been fighting to get the Brazilian environmental policy implemented in all areas. I have given continuity to what the government had been

doing and have expedited the implementation of more efficient measures in many areas. Until early in 2008, we did not have a plan on climate change, or a CO<sub>2</sub> emissions reduction plan, or the Amazon Fund. On the international stage, we no longer are a mere target of criticism from an international community concerned with fighting for the preservation of the planet. Today we receive praise from all over the world, consolidating a natural leadership in negotiations on the matter. Alongside such recognition, we have also attracted foreign investment. The Amazon Fund alone, which begins implementing its first six projects this year and follows a management model that is capable of ensuring that resources generate expected results, has already raised U\$1 billion in donations. Donors can only invest once we can assure them that established targets are being met, as they do not interfere in the allocation of resources or in the fund's sovereignty.

Therefore, I am confident that we are not heading to the Conference in Copenhagen with promises or the establishment of targets that are yet to be met. Our results so far authorise us to demand that the rest of the world wakes up and does their part. Brazil has been doing its homework very efficiently. It is no longer possible to accept that developed countries bill developing countries for the future of the planet. In the past they drew benefits from a predatory model, exploiting and extracting the wealth they now expend. Thus they are not entitled to ask nations that need to grow to bear the costs of preserving the planet on their own. First and foremost, they must reduce their current emissions and commit to sustainable development within and outside their borders. In the end, the planet is home to us all. ■



Bromeliads,  
Bocaina National  
Park, Atlantic  
Rainforest, Brazil