

OPEN LETTER TO CITES COP 19 FROM FUNBRASIL, 17.10.2022

(Original text in Portuguese)

To the national representatives of CITES, cordial greetings.

We would like to express our appreciation for this opportunity to introduce the Fundação Nacional do Pau-Brasil (National Pau-Brasil Foundation) and at the same time to explain our position regarding the proposal to place Pau-Brasil on Appendix I of CITES.

Brazil should be doubly proud of its national tree. It is the only tree that has given its name to a country, and it is the music tree which allows the highest expression of the human soul – music – to find its voice in all corners of the globe.

The National Pau-Brasil Foundation – FUNBRASIL – is the largest and most respected voice in Pau-Brasil conservation. It is an entirely Brazilian foundation, and its objectives are exclusively environmental ie. the preservation of the Pau-Brasil species and the preservation and ecological restoration of Pau-Brasil habitat. FUNBRASIL was created on July 30, 1988 by Professor Roldão de Siqueira Fontes, who since the 1970s dedicated his working life to saving Pau-Brasil from total extinction. As well as conservation, the Foundation promotes education, with the intention that all Brazilians should have the opportunity to learn about the only tree in the world to name a nation, our Brazilian Nation.

During the eight years that he presided over the Foundation up until his death in 1996, Professor Fontes travelled through various Brazilian states giving lectures, planting forests and distributing Pau-Brasil saplings.





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In his tireless fight for Pau-Brasil he left an invaluable legacy for the Brazilian nation. He raised awareness of the tree and of its unique place in our history, he successfully campaigned to have it protected in national legislation, and he was responsible for it being established as our National Tree through Federal Law no. 6.607 of 07.12.1978. He also wrote a seminal work about the history, botany and legal status of our National Tree, entitled "Pau-Brasil - A Dream of Rescue".

In addition to his outreach work which we continue to this day, prior to the creation of FUNBRASIL Professor Fontes was active in plantation and reforestation – he planted 50,000 Pau-Brasil trees on the safety margin of the Tapacurá dam in the municipality of São Lourenço da Mata, and established several hundred plantations in various states and municipalities of Brazil. Professor Fontes and FUNBRASIL have collectively been responsible for the planting of some two million seven hundred thousand specimens of Pau-Brasil on Brazilian soil, yet this humble man considered himself only a "small gardener of nature" in the face of the some 70 million Pau-Brasil trees that are estimated to have been felled and exported from the country between 1500 and 1875.

While always emphasizing the fulfillment of its main goal of planting a Pau-Brasil tree in each municipality and in each Brazilian school, between 2007 and 2018 FUNBRASIL competed for and won three contracts from the Pernambuco State Government to reforest three different areas, as well as reforesting another area on private land. We planted upwards of 30,000 seedlings of native Atlantic Forest species, particularly of Pau-Brasil, in each of these areas, totalling 120,000 trees planted in the Northern Mata region of the State.

In view of the above record, which can be easily verified by looking at the attached dossier, and because we are the only Institution that directs all of its physical, human and financial resources towards the defence of the Tree whose shade originated in our country, we consider ourselves invested with the right to give our opinion on the proposal of our respected CITES representatives to include the Pau-Brasil species in Appendix I of CITES.

Therefore, as its most legitimate defenders we take upon ourselves the right to disagree with this possible resolution.



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We do not believe that this is the best way to protect the few remnants of this species that still exist in our native forests. It is our considered opinion that any new prohibition will certainly lead to an exponential increase in the value of the wood that, one way or another, will be trafficked by middlemen and loggers and smuggled out of Brazil. Nor do we see any long or short term benefit in preventing (by means of an Appendix I listing) the careful and regulated use of the considerable number of planted trees which we and many others have helped to establish.

Furthermore, it is necessary to consider the great obstacle that will be imposed on the world of musical arts when we prevent the orchestras of the world from having access to the pernambuco bow - as important as or even more important than the instrument itself in drawing out the most perfect chords and the most sublime melodies that enrapture the soul of human beings. This symbiosis between our National Tree and the Great Arts is surely the key to the protection of our forests rather than the cause of their destruction.

Therefore let us think of other alternatives.

Those of us who make up the Foundation consider that the best way to give respite and protection to the remaining wild trees would be for the Federal Government to define strict criteria and norms for the legalisation of wood that has already been cut and which is in the possession of artisans, and to allow its commercialisation. And looking to the future, we invite our representatives to elaborate a mechanism for the legalisation of managed/planted wood, much of which is now reaching maturity and which will become usable in the next few years.

In exchange, a commitment would be established with the bow-making community to finance two types of reforestation with various native Atlantic Forest species, using a high percentage of Pau-Brasil: the first re-establishing the original flora in highly protected areas such as national parks, the second in areas suitable for future commercial exploitation, where the wood will be commercialised when it presents a diameter compatible with bow-making. We might consider financing these initiatives through a tax on all sales of Pau-Brasil wood, whereby the levy on each ton of purchased wood pays for the planting of at least 10 new trees.

With reference to the 2nd type of reforestation (with future commercial exploitation), we already have a perspective on how many years' growth are necessary for the tree to supply sufficient wood for the production of bows. In 2003 we requested authorization from IBAMA to remove two trees from the 50,000 planted on the safety margin of the Tapacurá River dam in 1972, in order to be able to define, at least approximately, at what age the trunk would have a diameter sufficient to support heartwood usable for the manufacture of bows. In the two photos below, we show the trunk of a 31 year old tree. We see that there is less than one centimetre of sapwood, leaving a trunk almost completely formed of heartwood. We believe that this variety can in fact be harvested in less than 20 years.



Similarly we can observe in the two photos below that the cross-section of this tree, also 31 years old, presents sapwood with a thickness of approximately 2 centimetres, but even so, the heartwood is well developed. We observe that this trunk also presents buttresses, indicating a different variety.



In the state of Espírito Santo, in the municipality of Guaraná, we had an excellent opportunity to obtain a log of wood from one of the cultivated Pau-Brasil trees which was uprooted during a storm in the year 2020, as can be seen below.



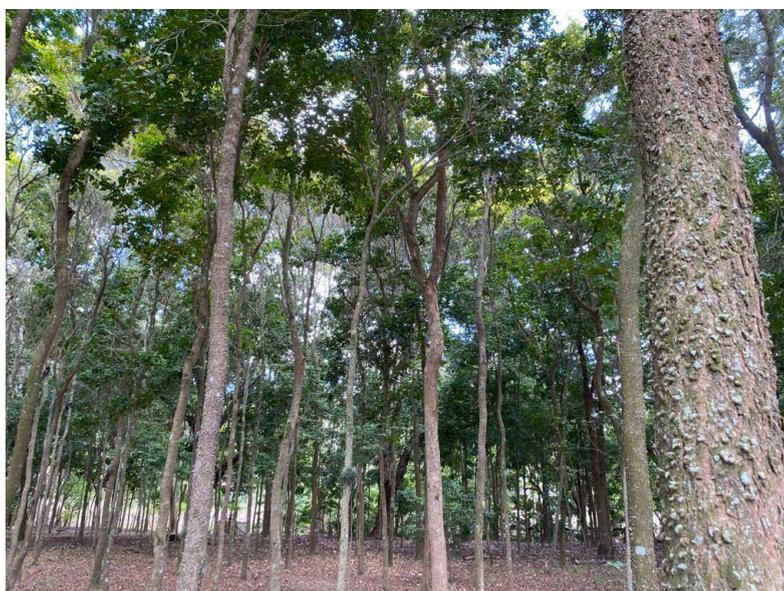
This tree was 22 years old. It was cut into 3 parts, and the thickest part was sawn into sticks, providing a total of 26 bow blanks. This tree was sawn at the request of and in the presence of IBAMA inspectors.



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In conclusion, I would like to stress that in this negotiation, everything rests in the hands of Brazil. Brazil has been a sovereign nation for 200 years, and this year we celebrate our anniversary.

It's fair to say that for five centuries our National Tree has been exploited by outsiders without any proportionate compensation to the Brazilian nation from those who use this precious wood. Happily we are living at a time when the future of the Pau-Brasil is at its brightest in that long and sorry history. FUNBRASIL has made important progress in the preservation of the species, and we are aware that many bow-makers are already planting Pau-Brasil forests (such as the one shown below) so as to ensure a future supply without jeopardizing the natural habitat.



Many hundreds of thousands of trees are currently reaching maturity, and only a very small proportion of these would satisfy the global demand for bow wood. The sole obstacle to a sustainable and responsible use of Pau-Brasil wood is the complex legal situation that has arisen with regard to permits for managed or planted timber. We believe that if we can resolve this issue, then we will relieve any pressure on the species and on native habitat from illegal felling or smuggling.



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Of course we should continue without cease to work for the conservation of the Pau-Brasil species – the only question is how best to achieve that. We suggest that rather than silencing the voice of musicians around the world who value our National Tree so highly, the future conservation of Pau-Brasil should be financed by a levy on the sale and export of sustainably managed wood, thus securing for the future the unique and special relationship between our national tree and the highest expression of music.

A decision to place Pau-Brasil on Appendix I would be ill-timed and ill -considered, and would undermine the many and varied conservation initiatives which are making a real and positive impact. We therefore add our voice to the many voices calling for CITES to reject this proposal.

Sincerely,

Ana Cristina de Siqueira Lima
Director of FUNBRASIL and daughter of Professor Roldão de Siqueira Fontes
October 2022

<http://www.unicap.br/berro/Berro500anos/ecologia.htm>

https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rold%C3%A3o_de_Siqueira_Fontes

English translation provided by Martin Swan 17.10.2022

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