

REMARKS OF SEN. JOHN HEINZ (R.PA)
CHICO MENDES MEMORIAL SERVICE
UNITED STATES CAPITOL
WASHINGTON, D.C.
JANUARY 25, 1989

ON MONDAY OF LAST WEEK I VISITED RIO BRANCO, IN THE STATE OF ACRE, HOME TO CHICO MENDES. THERE I WAS PRIVILEGED TO SIT DOWN AND TALK WITH, ILSEMAR, HIS WIDOW AND THE RUBBER TAPPERS WHOSE WAY OF LIFE HE DIED DEFENDING.

I LEARNED A GREAT DEAL ABOUT HIM DURING THOSE TALKS. AND I GUESS THE SIMPLEST WAY I CAN PUT IT IS THAT CHICO MENDES WAS A REAL WORKING MAN'S WORKING MAN. AND HE DIED A MARTYR IN THE UNIVERSAL FIGHT AGAINST DEPREDATION, GREED AND THE EXPLOITATION OF PEOPLE AND NATURE.

TO SEE THE RAIN FORESTS IS TO SEE CREATION. AND TO SEE BRAZIL'S RAIN FORESTS TODAY IS TO WITNESS THE PLOWING UNDER OF THE GARDEN OF EDEN.

CHICO MENDES UNDERSTOOD THAT REALITY. HE FOUGHT FOR THE RIGHT OF THE RUBBER TAPPERS AND THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE OF THE FOREST TO PURSUE A LIVELIHOOD THAT WAS SELF-SUSTAINING AND ECOLOGICALLY SOUND.

AND THAT PUT HIM AT THE FOREFRONT OF ANOTHER FIGHT, A GLOBAL FIGHT FOR OUR ENVIRONMENT. RAIN FORESTS COVER ONLY 7 PERCENT OF THE EARTH'S LAND MASS, YET THEY ARE THE LUNGS OF THE WORLD. BY REMOVING POTENTIALLY SMOTHERING GREENHOUSE GASES FROM THE ATMOSPHERE, THESE FORESTS SERVE AS OUR ONLY REAL LINE OF DEFENSE AGAINST A DANGEROUSLY WARMER WORLD. AND THEY ARE HOME TO OVER HALF THE WORLD'S SPECIES -- AN INCREDIBLE BIOLOGICAL AND GENETIC RESOURCE DEVELOPED OVER 6 MILLION YEARS AGO.

BUT, IF WE DON'T CHANGE DIRECTION SOON, A GOD GIVEN LEGACY THAT HAS STOOD FOR 6 MILLION YEARS WILL BE BEYOND SALVATION WITHIN A DECADE. THE FORCES OF DEVELOPMENT SLASH, BURN, POISON OR INUNDATE AN AREA THE SIZE OF BELGIUM EVERY YEAR. THE WORLD'S LUNGS ARE BEING EATEN BY A CANCER THAT WE ALL MUST FIGHT.

TO THE EXTENT THAT WE DO, THE SPIRIT OF CHICO MENDES LIVES ON. THAT SPIRIT CALLS US TO WORK CLOSELY WITH BRAZIL AND OTHER RAIN FOREST NATIONS TO FIND WAYS TO STOP THIS DESTRUCTION -- NOT JUST IN BRAZIL, BUT WHEREVER OUR FUTURE IS BEING TRADED FOR SHORT-SIGHTED, UNSUSTAINABLE, EXPLOITATIVE GAIN.

IN THAT SENSE, CHICO MENDES LEAVES A LEGACY TO MORE THAN RUBBER TAPPERS OR RAIN FORESTS. HE LEAVES A LEGACY TO ALL OF THOSE WHO ARE CONCERNED ABOUT ANY ASPECT OF THE ENVIRONMENT. ANY TIME I OR MY COLLEAGUES IN GOVERNMENT, OR LEADERS IN BUSINESS OR IN OTHER COUNTRIES AROUND THE WORLD -- ANY TIME WE WORK TO PROTECT THE INTEGRITY OF OUR PLANET, WE ARE CARRYING FORWARD THAT LEGACY.

AS LONG AS WE REMEMBER THAT, AS LONG AS WE REMEMBER THE COURAGEOUS EXAMPLE OF CHICO MENDES, THEN HE WILL NOT HAVE DIED IN VAIN. THE CREATION OF THE CHICO MENDES FOUNDATION AND THE SUPPORT OF ITS WORK IS THE HIGHEST TRIBUTE I THINK WE CAN OFFER TO HIS VALUES AND THE RESPECT FOR OUR PLANET WE ALL STAND FOR.