



Left to right: Swiss ambassador to Brazil, Rudolf Baerfuss; Brazil's Minister of the Environment, Marina Silva; Governor of Acre, Binho Marques. Photos: A. Sarre

## Conference opening

**T**HE OPENING CEREMONY began with the Brazilian national anthem followed by a dramatic performance depicting the birth of the state of Acre and the history of northeastern Brazilian immigrants to the region.

The welcoming committee was composed of conference organizers and a community representative. Each member of the committee spoke at the opening. **Andy White, RRI Coordinator**, highlighted the role of viable, vibrant CFEs as the base of the forest economy, beyond what some may consider to be small, romanticized development projects. **Francisco Moreno Valente, community leader from Boa Vista de Ramos in Brazil**, spoke on behalf of Brazilian communities and called for the reduction of taxes on community enterprises in order for them to survive commercially. **Alberto Chinchilla, Executive Secretary of ACICOFOC (Asociación Coordinadora Indígena y Campesina de Agroforestería Comunitaria Centroamericana)**, and GACF focal point for Latin America, observed that, for the next few days, the state of Acre would be the world capital of community forestry. The **Swiss Ambassador to Brazil, Rudolf Baerfuss**, spoke about the important contributions of the Swiss government that had helped to make the conference possible and wished all participants well in the coming days of learning.

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**Manoel Sobral Filho, ITTO Executive Director**, reminded participants of the first project supported by ITTO in Acre in 1989, which had made significant progress in helping to secure the future of local rubber-tappers and had helped make Acre a leader in community forest management. He said that he would like to revisit some of the case studies presented during the conference in ten years to see how much they had flourished.

The **Brazilian Minister of the Environment, Marina Silva**, observed that humanity is at a critical moment in its history. She compared the current situation to a two-way street in which communities contribute to global environmental benefits while depending on forests for their own livelihoods. The Brazilian government has supported these communities and their access to resources by creating new extractive reserves, which grew from 5 million hectares in 2005 to 10 million hectares in 2006. The innovative Public Forests Management Law seeks to recognize and support community management, since nearly 60% of public forests totaling 193 million hectares are managed by Indigenous

peoples, rubber-tappers and other traditional populations. State-supported community forest management took shape in Brazil in the 1990s and, today, 5500 families benefit from such management. Still, there are challenges ahead, including how to ensure access to credit lines, technical assistance, processing and value adding. Indeed, all actors need to rethink development and deal with the impacts of past development models, which oftentimes have led to the loss of biodiversity and contributed to climate change. How the world will address these impacts locally and internationally, in particular in regard to climate change, will be the greatest challenge of all. ITTO has a key role at both local and global levels, Ms Silva said. She suggested that ITTO establish a thematic fund for community forest management as a separate window.

The **Governor of Acre, Binho Marques**, welcomed participants and expressed his joy in hosting the conference. As the administrator of the state's third consecutive pro-forest governorship, he acknowledged that such policies would not have been possible without the social movement in Acre. He then presented certified wooden gifts to the panelists.

The opening concluded with violinist Micheals, who played three classical Brazilian pieces.