

Editorial

Provisional Measure (PM) No. 2186-16, of August 23 2001, carefully written up especially for the preservation of Brazilian biodiversity and our genetic heritage, has been apt in focusing upon Brazilian biopirates and was right on the mark in targeting Brazilian researchers involved in biological research.

Authorization for access to areas to collect plants and animals in biological areas may be likened to running an obstacle course filled with barriers. Many scientists who are not athletes either drop out of the race or become too antagonized with the dimension of the obstacles and offend the legislation established by the PM becoming then, overnight, biopirates. Obtaining authorization can take over one year's time, even when the authorization is for the collection of two or three types of marine organisms or plants, regardless of whether these samples are themes or theses of *CNPq* or *CAPES* post-graduate scholarship holders. What is most noteworthy in all this is that the very members of the Genetic Heritage Management Council, *Conselho de Gestão do Patrimônio Genético (CGEN)*, a council actually created within the *Ministério do Meio Ambiente* (i.e., Ministry of the Environment), which has the final say in diverse actions dealing with PM No. 2186-16, admits that the legislation is not appropriate for scientific research, which is the same opinion shared by *Ibama* (*Instituto Brasileiro do Meio Ambiente e dos Recursos Naturais Renováveis*), the Brazilian Institute for the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources. *Ibama* is the organ to which *CGEN* has granted credentials to authorize national, public and private institutions, dealing with research activities involving collection, access or sending of samples which are not characterized by bioprospecting or technological development, and which do not involve access to traditional associated knowledge.

In spite of the consensus that the Provisional Measure inhibits, (instead of supporting) studies on national biodiversity, the bureaucracy of *Ibama* remains steadfast, requiring the signatures of the highest directors in Institutions of Higher Learning when (*IES*) asking for authorizations.

Signatures of the *IES* Deans requires, in certain universities, that the request pass through the hands of at least four colleagues who, usually, will meet once a month. Many times, since the *Ibama* requests are for one specific species of plant material which will be the object of a Master's dissertation, requirement of the signature of one of the highest Directors of the University is but one more burden for the researcher and one more reason to pull him out of the laboratory and away from his research.

The Brazilian community of chemists of natural products is one of the most harmed by *Ibama's* bureaucracy. Many research groups suspend their collection trips to collect plant material in parks and reserves because the simple isolation of a micromolecular substance (be it already known or entirely new) to parks and reserves means access to the genetic heritage, which has been the stumbling block to projects approved and financed by Brazilian funding agencies.

The worst is that until today, more authorizations have been granted for bioprospecting studies and technological development than for basic scientific research. This problem is caused in part by the lack of understanding of the analysts of the Ministry of the Environment (*Ministério do Meio Ambiente*), concerning the type of research developed by natural product chemists in Brazil.

Natural product chemists consider it important to preserve the integrity of Brazil's genetic heritage and its biodiversity, as well as the appreciation of the indigenous population's traditional knowledge in general, and reaffirm that the PM serves these objectives. However, the natural product chemical community appeals to the Minister of the Environment (*Ministra do Meio Ambiente*) to clarify to its integrants the differences between conceding authorization for collecting samples for economic purposes or the traditional knowledge associated, and collection for academic purposes.

It is important that natural product chemists not disobey the Provisory Measure and wait for the situation to be resolved by *Ibama* authorities.

The Minister, the Honourable Mrs. Marina Silva, deserves a vote of confidence from the Brazilian natural product community. Her ideas, her struggle to defend the preservation and scientific knowledge of biodiversity are the same as those of the natural product chemists who for years have dedicated themselves wholeheartedly to the study of Brazilian flora and fauna.

And thus, our hope is that good sense will prevail. Provisory Measure No. 2186-16 was written up to preserve Brazilian biodiversity and genetic heritage and not to create obstacles for the academic community, whose objectives only concern scientific knowledge of Brazilian biodiversity, one of Brazil's greatest heritages, which now more than ever before needs to be studied to be better known and preserved.

Angelo C. Pinto
Editor (*IQ-UFRJ*)