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Brazil government 'worst logger'



Logs in rainforest

High food and commodity prices are increasing the pressure on the Amazon

Brazil's government has been named as the worst illegal logger of Amazon forests by one of its own departments.

The Environment Ministry has drawn up a list of the 100 worst offenders and says all of them will be charged.

Topping the list was the Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform (Incra), a government department which distributes land to the poor.

The revelation came after an official report revealed that deforestation in the Amazon region was gathering pace.

The six largest deforested areas since 2005 all belonged to Incra, Environment Minister Carlos Minc said.

In total 550,000 acres of the world's largest rainforest was destroyed on those six properties.

Greenpeace has accused Incra officials of illegally handing over rainforest to logging companies and creating fake settlements to skirt environmental regulations.

But Incra's president, Rolf Hackbart, said all the areas cited by Mr Minc as being deforested by his department were areas legally settled between 1995 and 2002.

'Terrible result'

Mr Minc told a news conference he would take legal action against all of the loggers.

"We're going to blow all 100 of them out of the water and then some," Reuters quoted him as saying.

Meanwhile, official data released by Mr Minc showed a renewed increase in the rate of deforestation.

About 760 sq km (300 sq miles) of the Amazon was destroyed last month, compared with 230 sq km in August 2007.

"It was a terrible result," Mr Minc said.

He blamed expanding cattle and farm activity, as well as land theft through the falsification of property titles.

The environment minister said he would create an environmental police force with 3,000 armed officers to help combat deforestation.