Article on the Brazilian Amazon Region

Let's save our city from hell!

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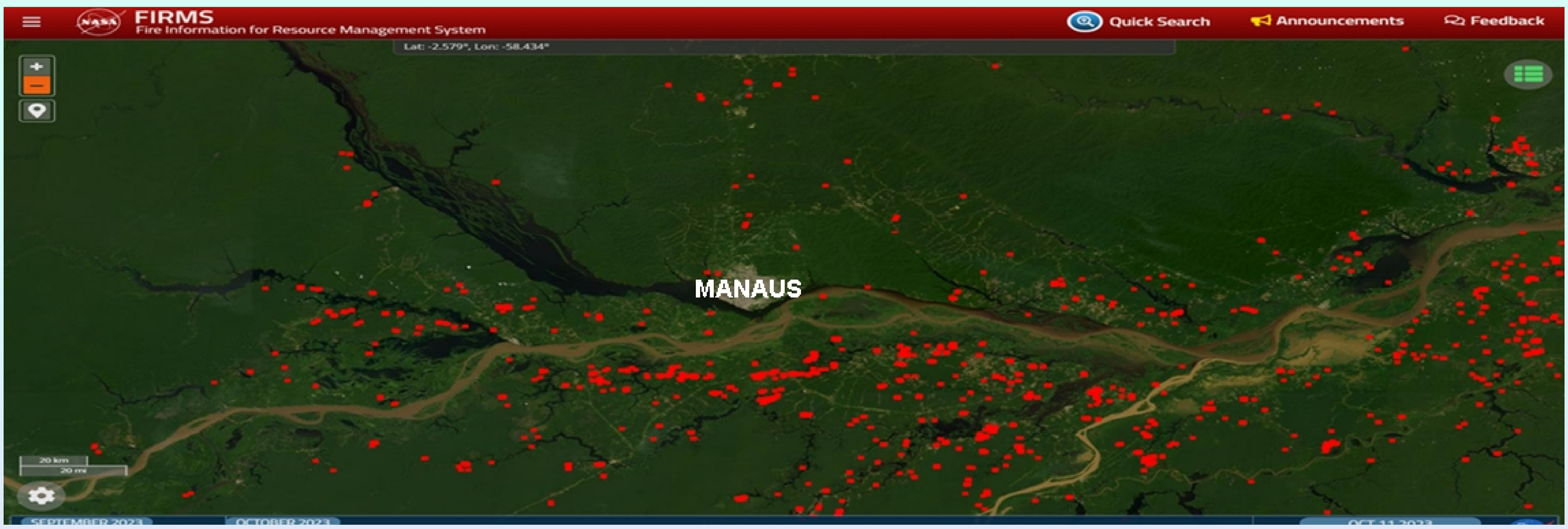

Burning Areas Surrounding Manaus on 11 October 2023
Source: NASA FIRMS

This year we have witnessed extreme climate events around the world, with a lot of thermal discomfort, drought and smoke in Manaus city, capital of Amazon. To prevent our city from becoming a hell, urgent changes are needed and every citizen has an important role in this paradigm shift.

In Brazil, the authorities have not yet presented a long-term sustainable development plan focusing on the country's decarbonization and the behavioral changes needed to make this transition. Instead, they distract and even mis-educate the population with fake news, distorted news or denialism.

For example, former president Bolsonaro (PL) spread around 105 (4.1% of the total of 2,516) false or distorted news items about the environment in 2021 <**https://tinyurl.com/2tnych6m/**>. In addition, a denialist discourse was adopted regarding the country's serious environmental problems, followed by an agenda full of environmental setbacks that resulted in the weakening of oversight agencies and a considerable increase in deforestation and wildfires <**https://tinyurl.com/5dbtufhs; https://tinyurl.com/b6druyfw**>.

President Lula (PT), on the other hand, has been demanding more resources from rich countries at international forums to combat climate change. For example, almost two months ago, when opening the UN Assembly, he demanded "acting against change implies facing inequalities... and that rich countries grew based on a model with high emissions of greenhouse gases", being applauded five times during his speech <**https://tinyurl.com/23cebw5m**>.

The speech sounds nice, but the comrade, whether due to poor counsel, bad character or ignorance, does not tell the international community and the Brazilian people that:

- Brazil is the fourth country (113 Gt of CO2; 4.52% of the global total) that has released the most CO2 into the earth's atmosphere since the Industrial Revolution (1850-2021), behind the US (509 Gt), China (284 Gt) and Russia (172 Gt). The difference is that while these three countries emitted a lot of CO2 through the burning of fossil fuels and cement use (82.5%, 85% and 68%), in Brazil, 86% of our emissions come from the misuse of land and forests <**https://tinyurl.com/3d7fz62t**>.
- Deforestation and/or wildfire records have already been registered under his administration <**https://tinyurl.com/yc3ukhpd**; **https://tinyurl.com/2p9xb5nt>**;

The fact is that we have been terrible managers of our lands and forests <**https://tinyurl.com/2b5xzmj8**; **https://tinyurl.com/4y5rbek9**> and we can no longer hide this. Most cities are poorly planned. Those who have lived in Manaus for years know that our green areas and rivers have been openly destroyed to make way for public or private projects full of concrete, metal, wood and asphalt. In general, the buildings are unsustainable. One need only look at how gas stations, factories, warehouses, shops, pharmacies, shopping centers, supermarkets, residential complexes, churches, schools, small markets, houses etc. are being installed.

The modus operandi is similar: trees are removed, the organization infrastructure is built and around it more cement and asphalt is poured. Some even put in palm trees, grass or gardens, but this "green space" does not produce even 10% of the shade and environmental comfort that the old trees produced.

The accumulation of this lack of collective and environmental awareness generates irreparable damage to our city. For example, we no longer have clean streams to bathe in - they have all been killed! If we want a natural bath, we have to go to other neighbouring cities that are going through the same process of environmental degradation.

In addition, our buildings are "scorching" and walking in Manaus has become unbearable, as we are bombarded by the stench of the streams, air pollution (smoke) and excessive heat coming from all directions (sun, walls, asphalt or cement floors, vehicle gases, air conditioners, wildfires, invasions, deforestation etc.).

In this way, we are turning the famous "firewood port" into an open-air scalding cauldron. If we continue at this pace, Manaus will become a hell - an inhospitable environment for our children and grandchildren, very different from when I was a child and had fun in backyards, climbing trees, watching birds or bathing in the streams that existed in the Petrópolis neighborhood, located in the south of Manaus.

Bearing in mind that the increase in thermal discomfort has to do with greenhouse gas emissions, especially carbon dioxide, directly related to unsustainable patterns of production/construction and consumption in our society, it is necessary for citizens and governments to take initiatives to change energy matrices and consumption habits over time.

Individually, there is much to be done and below is a list of sustainable behaviors, classified into five dimensions, for the reader to do a self-assessment from 1 to 5, with 1 = Not aware; 2 = Only aware; 3 = Planning changes; 4 = Initiated changes; 5 = Highly aware and practitioner.

For each dimension, there are five items, as follows:

Political Dimension: Dp1 Conscious voting for candidates with sustainable projects; Dp2 Participate in peaceful climate protests; Dp3 Demand projects that improve the environment; Dp4 Make donations to environmental causes; Dp5 Recommend sustainable proposals to the government.

Family Dimension: Df1 Reduce meat consumption; Df2 Do composting or recycling; Df3 My residence collects rainwater; Df4 Reduce waste of resources; Df5 Avoid plastic bags.

Educational Dimension: De1 Take courses on the environment; De2 Read about sustainable solutions; De3 Disseminate reliable information on good sustainable practices; De4 Volunteer in sustainable actions; De5 Give lectures on environment-related topics.

Professional Dimension: Dp1 Reduce paper use; Dp2 Turn off equipment/lights when not in use; Dp3 Make digital payments; Dp4 Prefer virtual meetings; Dp5 Participate in sustainable projects in the organization where I work.

Transformative Dimension: Dt1 Buy products with sustainable seals (e.g. biodegradable, non-toxic); Dt2 Go for walks; Dt3 Use public transport; Dt4 Share resources with people; Dt5 Implement sustainable solutions in the community such as environmental education, planting and cultivation of trees, recycling, biogas, implementation of solar energy etc.

Finally, to reach the total, add up all the points and to prevent Manaus from becoming hell, the reader needs to reflect on the results and continually seek to improve their attitudes and actions:

Total between 25 to 50 points: I am part of the indifferent, with low environmental awareness and few sustainable practices. Recommendation: dialogue with more proactive or advanced people and try to adopt a new practice every week to create habits.

Total between 51 to 75 points: You are a dreamer, as there is awareness, but you can't get dreams off the ground. Does not hinder or help, prefers the comfort zone. Recommendation: look for a serious organization that carries out inspiring projects may be the key for you to shine.

Total between 76 to 100 points: You are proactive, with sustainable behavioral actions underway, but can improve scope and effectiveness. Recommendation: it would be interesting to expand and share practices.

Total between 101 to 125 points: Wow, you are to be congratulated. You present a high level of awareness and practice, serving as an inspiration to society. Recommendation: continue to train new leaders and disseminate your practices.