



Source: Cavalcanti, 13 December 2013, Agência Brasil, photographer Tomaz Silva

DA COSTA HOLANDA CAVALCANTI, Geraldo Egídio (Geraldo Holanda Cavalcanti)

Brazilian diplomat and fourth Secretary-General of the Latin Union 1997-2000

By **Dawisson Belém Lopes and Diego Vasconcelos Neto** · Version 1 September 2015

Was born 6 February 1929 in Recife, Brazil. He is the son of Egydio de Sá Cavalcanti, a small business owner, and Nativa da Costa Holanda. On 20 October 1951 he married Stella Teixeira, philosopher, with whom he had one daughter and two sons. After their separation in 1964, he married Dirce de Assis, sculptor and writer, on 17 February 1965. She brought two daughters and one son. Because legal divorce did not exist at the time, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued passports, which declared them a couple. The divorce and marriage became legal in 1978.

Biography

Cavalcanti was raised in Recife, the capital of the culturally rich northeastern Brazilian state of Pernambuco. He was the second child in a lower middle class family with strong Catholic traditions and had four sisters. From his childhood Cavalcanti considered becoming a priest and even ‘wanted to become a saint’, as he writes in his autobiography *As Desventuras da Graça* (*The Misadventures of Grace*; Cavalcanti 2010: 67). As a teenager he enjoyed reading the works of European Christian thinkers, such as Georges Bernanos, León Bloy, Gilbert Keith Chesterton, Jacques Maritain and François Mauriac. After the Second World War, however, French existentialists, especially Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre, began to exert influence on him, which led him to relinquish any and all religious affiliation in his early twenties (Belém Lopes 2015). During his high school years he studied

at Colégio Nóbrega, a traditional Jesuit school, where he became president of Juventude Estudantil Católica, the Catholic high school youth movement. He then attended the Faculty of Law of Recife, where he became president of Juventude Universitária Católica, the Catholic university youth movement. With regard to his apparent vocation to play leading roles, Cavalcanti recognized that 'he always ended up as president' of whichever association he joined (Cavalcanti 2010: 223). Thanks to his relentless effort to win an academic contest whose prize was a travel grant, while still a university student he travelled to the Netherlands where he interned with The Hague Academy of International Law. In 1951 he obtained his Bachelor of Laws and Social Sciences degree in Recife. He returned to the Netherlands to work at the Brazilian Embassy and later moved to Rio de Janeiro to prepare himself for the entrance exam for a Brazilian diplomatic career. In 1954 he finally entered the diplomatic service, having been approved first in the competitive examination process for the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

As Third Secretary, the first rank of a diplomatic career, Cavalcanti's professional start was in the Ministry's Cultural Division and soon afterwards in the Economic and Consular Department. In both cases he dealt with legal aspects of international relations. In 1956 Cavalcanti began his first resident mission abroad in the Brazilian Embassy in Washington DC where, apart from other responsibilities and achievements, he served as part of the commission in charge of drafting the Statute of the Inter-American Development Bank, which was set up in 1959. On the invitation of Ambassador Roberto Campos, who was at the time President of the Brazilian National Bank of Economic Development, Cavalcanti returned to Rio de Janeiro in that year and became the first head of the Division of Contracts and Agreements of the Bank's newly established Department of International Operations. He was trusted with structuring the department and remained in this function until 1960, when he moved to Geneva, Switzerland to serve in the Brazilian Consulate. The following year Cavalcanti worked again with Ambassador Campos in advising on the consolidation of the Brazilian public debt and the acquisition of financial credits from development banks and the governments of Belgium, the Federal Republic of Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom (UK). In 1962 Cavalcanti was promoted to Second Secretary and returned to the Brazilian Embassy in Washington. In the United States (US) he participated as a delegate to two United Nations (UN) conferences on commodities that were particularly important for Brazil, given the country's large production of coffee and cocoa and the efforts of Third World countries to get control over commodity agreements: the 1962 International Coffee Conference and the 1963 International Cocoa Conference.

In 1963 Cavalcanti helped prepare the Brazilian delegation for the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). When UNCTAD took place in 1964, Cavalcanti served as a delegate representing Brazil. These were stirring times, as Cavalcanti and his wife had decided to separate and a coup d'état resulted in a military government that ruled Brazil until 1985. In 1964 Cavalcanti was transferred to the Brazilian Embassy in Moscow, where he became the head of the Embassy's Economic Affairs Sector. He also became known in Brazil as a poet after publishing various volumes with poetry in 1964 and 1965. Cavalcanti was promoted to First Secretary and became the head of the Embassy's Political Affairs Sector in 1966. The following year he returned to the US to head the New York office of the Brazilian Coffee Institute, an organ subordinate to the Brazilian Ministry of Industry and Trade. He remained in this position for three years while also engaged with several other posts related to the international coffee trade. He served as chairman of the Pan-American Coffee Bureau and chairman of the Coffee Brewing Institute, both in New York, and as Brazil's representative at the International Coffee Council and President of the World Coffee Promotion Committee, both in London. In 1970 Cavalcanti was invited to head the Brazilian Consulate General in Hong Kong, which also included the role of observer to the People's Republic of China, as Brazil did not yet have diplomatic relations with China. He was promoted to Second Class Minister in 1973 and moved to the Federal Republic of Germany, where he exercised the functions of Minister-Counsellor at the embassy in Bonn. In the following year Foreign Minister Antonio Francisco Azeredo da Silveira invited him to join his Cabinet, successively as Deputy Head of Office and as Special Advisor on strategic

planning. Cavalcanti was promoted to First Class Minister in 1976 and served as Special Secretary for Bilateral Political and Economic Affairs.

In 1978 Cavalcanti was appointed Ambassador to UNESCO, the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in Paris, where he led a number of delegations to international conferences and meetings, on topics such as informatics, double taxation of copyright royalties and the implications of technological and communications trends for development. He took part in the World Heritage Committee meetings, which resulted in the inclusion of the Brazilian cities of Ouro Preto and Olinda into the World Heritage List of UNESCO. He furthermore represented Brazil in regular meetings of the International Hydrological Programme, the International Oceanographic Commission, the International Co-ordinating Council of the Man and the Biosphere and the International Council of the General Information Programme. From 1982 to 1986 Cavalcanti was the Brazilian Ambassador to Mexico, where he dedicated himself to the bilateral aspects of the mission as well as to developing collective understandings for solving regional and hemispheric issues. During this time he acted as head of the Brazilian delegations to several Latin American intergovernmental conferences on cultural policies, water resources, science and technology and agriculture. He also headed the Brazilian delegation to the Special Meeting of High Level Government Representatives of the Latin American Integration Association in Acapulco (1985) and the Special Representatives meeting of the Contadora Group for Supporting Conflict Resolution in Central America in Mexico City in 1986. He furthermore represented the Brazilian Justice Minister at the Regional Meeting of Ministers of Justice and Attorneys-General for Assessment of Restrictive Measures on the International Trade on Illicit Drugs in Puerto Vallarta (1986). During his mission in Mexico Cavalcanti exercised functions in two institutes of the Organization of American States: the Inter-American Indian Institute, as a member of its Governing Council and Chairman of its Executive Committee (1982-1986), and the Pan American Institute of Geography and History, as a member of its Governing Council (1982-1983). In 1984 he became a permanent member of the Mexican Academy of International Relations.

From 1986 to 1990 Cavalcanti was the Brazilian Ambassador to the Commission of the European Communities in Brussels, Belgium. Although much of his role was essentially political in nature, his prior technical experience in negotiations relating to commodities and international trade were useful during bilateral negotiations on the reduction of tariffs and technical barriers to trade. His position as Ambassador also implied the role as Brazilian representative before the European Parliament in Brussels and Strasbourg, France. Together with the Ambassadors of Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay, Cavalcanti initiated official contacts between MERCOSUR, the Southern Common Market of the four countries, and the European Communities. He also prepared the first visit of foreign ministers of the MERCOSUR countries to the President of the Commission and the meetings between the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Rio Group, an organization of Latin American and some Caribbean states set up in 1986, and the ministers of the European Communities' countries held in Rome, Italy and Dublin, Ireland in 1990. In 1991 he decided to end his career as a Brazilian diplomat and successfully requested early retirement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Cavalcanti returned to Brazil, where he began another life, being appointed President of Ericsson Telecommunications in São Paulo (1991-1993). In spite of his new role as a businessman, he continued to take part in seminars on bilateral relations between Brazil (or Latin America at large) and the European Union. In 1993 Cavalcanti left Ericsson and accepted some diplomatic functions, as he was named Personal Representative of the President of Brazil in the Commission to address cooperation in border areas with Colombia. Cavalcanti headed the Brazilian delegation to the International Conference on Population and Development the UN held in Cairo, Egypt in 1994 and he was also invited to participate in the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations' Atlantic Conference in Marbella, Spain. In 1995 President Fernando Henrique Cardoso designated Cavalcanti as his personal representative to the Carlsson Group of Heads of State and Heads of Government to Support Multilateralism, set up by Swedish Prime Minister Ingvar Carlsson. The following year Cavalcanti led

the Brazilian delegation to the Second UN Conference on Human Settlements, known as Habitat II, in Istanbul, Turkey.

In 1997 Cavalcanti, who had been on the international road for more than four decades, accepted an invitation by Latin Union founder and Secretary-General (since 1983) Philippe Rossillon to present his candidacy as Secretary-General of the Paris-based international organization that was set up in 1954 to deal with the protection and dissemination of the languages and cultures of Latin expression. Sérgio Corrêa da Costa, a colleague from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and a mutual friend, had recommended Cavalcanti to Rossillon, who was seeking a Brazilian to take over the Latin Union's leadership. The Brazilian government, however, did not fully support Cavalcanti at the time, as other diplomatic questions were considered to take precedence. However, Cavalcanti was unanimously elected by the member states later that year, mostly because of his acknowledged personal record as a world-class diplomat and the political campaign waged by Rossillon to make him his successor. Cavalcanti's initial measures as Secretary-General involved the formalization and structural reform of the organization, which lacked the financial and other resources to be very active. He pursued legal recognition from the UN, ensuring that Latin Union representatives would be allowed to take part in General Assembly meetings. Cavalcanti also proposed a new relationship between the Latin Union and other governmental and non-governmental organizations, similar to the International Organization of the Francophonie, with the prospect of transforming the organization into a more active and sustainable political body in the longer run. He initiated a new Statute, had a formal career track for Latin Union's staff approved (which did not exist before) and created an institutional section devoted to audiovisual events and specialized publications. Concerning the diffusion of Latin idioms around the world, Cavalcanti endorsed programmes to protect endangered minority languages, as in the cases of Romanian- and Spanish-speaking populations in, respectively, Moldova and the Philippines. By sponsoring several roundtables, academic seminars and research projects in South American and African countries he also engaged in promoting his mother tongue. He furthermore encouraged scientific translations into Latin languages by awarding special prizes to outstanding technical works from Brazil and Mexico and he commissioned the publication of a dictionary of medical jargons and local terms from Aymara, Guaraní, Portuguese, Quechua and Spanish to be used in Latin American rural zones where indigenous populations had limited access to health care. Among the organization's specific duties and his responsibility were granting the prestigious Prix Union Latine de Littératures Romanes, awarded to novelists from the member states. During his term as Secretary-General three African countries (Angola, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal) joined and the organization held major art exhibitions in Brazil, France, Italy, Mexico and Spain. In December 2000 Bernardino Osio from Italy succeeded Cavalcanti as Secretary-General. Much later, in 2010, Cavalcanti attempted to support the weakly functioning organization by assisting with the signing of a Cooperation Agreement between the Latin Union and the Community of Portuguese Language Countries, but due to financial difficulties and some resistance from the Italian delegation – who claimed that the organization served as a political tool for the French-speaking community of states (Belém Lopes 2015) – the Latin Union announced the suspension of its activities and the dissolution of its Secretariat in January 2012.

After his term as Secretary-General of the Latin Union Cavalcanti's long career as an experienced and versatile diplomat, serving in Brazil's bilateral and multilateral relations, ended in 2000. In the late 1990s Cavalcanti had begun to publish more poems and also to translate foreign poetry into Portuguese. He now devoted all his available time to cultural and literary activities. He was elected a member of PEN Club Brazil and in 2013 became its President. At the time of writing, Cavalcanti still exercises the role of Vice-President of the Miguel Cervantes Foundation to Support Reading and is a member of the Editorial Board of the *Poesia Sempre* magazine of the Fundação Biblioteca Nacional as well as a member of the Technical Council of the Brazilian National Confederation of Trade, Industry and Tourism. He has received numerous awards and honorary appointments in Brazil as well as in Côte d'Ivoire, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Peru, Portugal, Senegal and the UK. In

2010 he became an 'immortal' member of the Brazilian Academy of Letters and in 2013 was elected its President.

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