

Brazil Has a Lot to Gain from His Mission, Says First Brazilian Astronaut

Contributed by Adriana Franzin
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Brazilian lieutenant-coronel Marcos Pontes gave a press conference directly from the International Space Station via videoconference. The first Brazilian astronaut to participate in a space flight spoke to the reporters for 20 minutes.

According to Pontes, the space mission met "100% of the expectations" from the scientific perspective, in terms of publicizing the space program, and in the historical aspect.

"Carrying our flag represents a lot for the future and for history, as the centennial of Santos Dumont's flight," he recalled.

The mission was denominated the Centennial Mission to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the first flight made by the Brazilian inventor, Santos Dumont, in his 14 Bis, in Paris.

In Pontes' opinion, Brazil took an important step to solidify its position among the countries with space programs. "When we represent Brazil and carry this flag, we sense the impact this has on millions of Brazilians and the international community."

Replying to criticisms over the cost of the mission (US\$ 10 million), he emphasized the motivation it gave to young people and said that the country "has much to gain" from a mission like this one.

A cooperation agreement signed by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva last October with Russia reduced the price of the Brazilian astronaut's trip to under half of what the Russians normally charge for this type of flight, something on the order of US\$ 10 million.

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