



XIITH INTERNATIONAL AMAZON FOREST ENCOUNTER "HOW TO RESCUE OUR FUTURE"

**Brownsberg (Agwago Kun), Suriname
August 14-18, 2015**

International retreat in the Amazon Forest of thinkers, authors, researchers, artists, professionals and social activists committed to the cause of humanity to pool insights on actions to rescue the future of humanity that has gone astray and needs urgent reconnection to evolution.

Organized by:

CRSCENTER, Caribbean Reality Studies Center (Aruba)

SWI, Stichting Wetenschappelijke Informatie (Suriname)

IGSR, Institute for Graduate Studies & Research (University of Suriname)



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I. THEME AND VENUE

Humanity has gone astray and is already overhanging the abyss of oblivion. We antagonized nature to unbearable levels, blocked the way to cooperative solutions, and cynically turned war into the ultimate arbiter of peace. We disconnected from evolution and now urgently need to find ways to reconnect to a life-giving route to rescue our future. That has been the driving force over the years behind the International Amazon Forest Encounter, which celebrates its twelfth gathering under the theme “How to Rescue Our Future?” from August 14-18, 2015. This annual retreat in the midst of pristine Amazon Forest on the top of the Agwago Kun Mountain (Brownsberg, Suriname) brings together concerned thinkers, scholars, authors, researchers, artists, professionals and social activists, regardless of their background, fields of study or place of residence, to engage in constructive discussion, dialogue and reflection on strategies and actions to rescue the future of humanity. Such a vibrant ambience of Mother Earth offers an ideal humbling location for thought-provoking reflections and pluralistic exchanges on manmade dangers that threaten our stay on earth. In an open encounter, all participants can share ideas about where we come from, stand now and head. That culminates in reflections on strategies and actions to rescue our future and on the chances to create a better world than the spiteful version of today.

II. RECORD OF ENCOUNTERS

Eleven years in a row sharpened critical reflections among a varying group of participants, in a different ambience than many academic, governmental and non-governmental summits, which tend to serve system maintenance rather than exploring feasible alternatives to overcome the existential challenges that haunt humanity today.

Statistics kept of encounters from 2004 to 2014 show more than 160 participants from fifteen countries, which included professors, directors of centers, representatives of NGOs, social activists, artists and renowned authors, but also some postgraduate students with a youthful new generation view. Constructive reflections rather than consensus-seeking always marked the pluralistic retreat, although inspiring encounter discussions typically left participants with a sense of solidarity and convergence in the conviction that there was still space for remedial action as architects of history.

III. RELEVANCE AND URGENCY

“More than half of humanity is unhealthy because they have too little to eat, while much of the rest is unhealthy because they eat too much. There is no necessity for obesity to go hand in hand with famine. Happiness is possible without creating misery for others, yet the misfortune of billions of people makes that goal look unattainable.”¹

¹ Glenn Sankatsing, *Quest to Rescue Our Future*, forthcoming

So far, the encounters offered a thought-provoking forum to address humanity’s existential threats in a quest for urgently required responses at the local, regional and global level. In that sense, many encounter discussions have clustered around humanity’s irresponsible tampering with the exceptional environmental conditions that made life possible on planet Earth. A recurrent theme has been the assault against harmony and peace by brutal fundamentalisms that swarm temples to pray to God to kill the God of the other. At the core of the discussion about awareness and alternatives stood the persistent urge to dominate others by seizing command over their destiny, which went hand in hand with mental slavery as a strategy to break the social response capacity of the subdued.

From the very beginning, the encounters also served to trigger critical discussions in feedback sessions on the manuscript of the book ‘Quest to Rescue Our Future’ (forthcoming), which is critical about the hoax of development that complicated our troubles at the local, national, regional and global level. It defines development as the mobilization of inherent assets and potentialities in interactive response to challenges posed by nature, habitat and history to realize a sustainable project under one’s own command. Rather than development, what



became dominant was envelopment, which did not adapt the model to fit the reality of other social contexts, but modified reality to accommodate the model. The outcome has been social, cultural, economic, political and military domination of the world by powerful global centers and small local elites that turned coercion, repression, violence and war into prime agents of system maintenance. The big tragedy of humanity lies in the absurd destructive principle that war is the guardian angel of peace.

Fortunately, history is never a history of fatalities, always a history of possibilities, which require going to the root of the problem. Not hindered by ideology, dogma, tradition, established wisdom or the myopia of race, ethnicity or religion, the retreat offers a sea of time in the warmth of solidarity to engage in critical reflection, discussion, mutual feedback and cross fertilization from a wide variety of research fields, geographical environments and cultural backgrounds.

Without downplaying the symptoms of distress or exaggerating the magnitude of our misfortune, the pursuit was an unadulterated diagnosis of our route, condition and challenges, in order to enhance the response capacity to rescue our endangered future. So far, the encounter brought together wonderful groups of engaged participants who gathered to explore more promising roads than today’s pointless slopes to the abyss.

IV. ORGANIZATION

The XIIth International Amazon Forest Encounter “How to Rescue Our Future” is a joint initiative of the following institutions:

- Caribbean Reality Studies Center (CRSCenter), Aruba, represented by Dr. Glenn Sankatsing
- Stichting Wetenschappelijke Informatie (Foundation for Scientific Information, SWI), Suriname, represented by Prof. Jack Menke
- Institute for Graduate Studies & Research of the University of Suriname (IGSR), Suriname, represented by Prof. Marten Schalkwijk.

The logistics of the encounter is in hands of an experienced support team, including a fine cook in Surinamese cuisine. The lodging facilities on the cleared mountain plateau in rustic houses with panoramic forest and lake-views have electricity, water and sanitary provisions. Facilities at the meeting site include computer, printer, sound system and presentation devices, with permanent cellular phone reach for national and international calls. Nature Conservation Foundation of Suriname (STINASU) is in charge of the management and maintenance of the location, supported by a local resident staff and service team. So far, the gatherings turned out to be enjoyable and safe for all participants.

The quiet location in a resource-rich tropical country that is still 80% pristine Amazon forest, offers an inspiring site for reflections for a diagnosis of our troubles, a search for a viable alternative of development and identification of remedial actions. Additionally, scholars of society and professionals in the field of development strategies have an excellent opportunity to know an extraordinary part of the Caribbean with a quilt of cultures from all continents living in tolerance and peace.

The main language of the encounter is English, while bilingual volunteers among the participants will translate presentations in Spanish and Portuguese.

V. PROGRAM

The encounter is an open exchange of views with in-depth discussions on the contemporary state of affairs, threats and trends of humanity, on the options for development and on viable roads to the future. The program offers plenty of space for participants to share their views in presentations, statements and discussions in four panels on: (i) social evolution of humanity (development, envelopment, domination); (ii) imminent ecocataclysm (environment, climate change and biodiversity); (iii) fundamentalism (religion, war, peace and global harmony), and (iv) actions to rescue our future (awareness, alternatives and rehumanization of humanity). Parallel informal meetings will offer ample space for personal exchange to share each other’s work, professional history, and line of research, and to discuss follow up and cooperation initiatives.

The sea of time to bring joy and creativity together will include the “Star Night Gathering” and the “Cultural Night”, which is a reminder that, historically, the most democratic institution of humanity has been shared music and art.

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PROVISIONAL PROGRAM

The final program will adjust to the proposed presentations and contain their titles.

General coordinator: Prof. Jack Menke

Organizing Committee members: Prof. Marten Schalkwijk and dr. Glenn Sankatsing

| DATE | TIME | ACTIVITY | LOCATION |
|-------------------------------|--|--|--|
| August 14 Friday | 7.30pm | Welcome Dinner and Cocktail in Paramaribo | Private Residence at the bank of the Suriname River, Paramaribo |
| August 15 Saturday | 7.45a 8.15a 11.15a Afternoon Evening | Gathering at the point of departure , IGSR Travel by bus to Brownsberg Installation PANEL 1 – SOCIAL EVOLUTION OF HUMANITY (Development, Envelopment, Domination) Star Night Gathering | Institute of Graduate Studies and Research, University Building, Leysweg |
| August 16 Sunday | Morning Afternoon Evening | PANEL 2 – IMMINENT ECOCATACLYSM (Environment, Climate Change And Biodiversity) PANEL 3 – FUNDAMENTALISM (Religion, War and Global Harmony) Campfire and Cultural Night | Brownsberg |
| August 17 Monday | Morning Afternoon Evening | PANEL 4 ACTIONS TO RESCUE OUR FUTURE? (Alternatives, Development Issues, Rehumanization of Humanity) Forest walk to waterfalls Barbeque and Farewell Party | Brownsberg |
| August 18 Tuesday | Morning Afternoon 2.00pm 5.30pm | PANEL 4 – GENERAL DISCUSSION ON ENCOUNTER THEMES Evaluation and Closure Departure from Brownsberg Back in Paramaribo | Brownsberg - Paramaribo |



VI. COSTS

The Encounter is an independent non-profit activity of the collaborating institutions that covers (part of the) costs with contributions of participants. So far, the encounter did not consider any external funding to safeguard autonomy. Participants should take care of airline tickets for travel to Suriname, and (if applicable) visa costs, as well as hotel accommodation and stay in Paramaribo during the days before and after the Brownsberg gathering. Typically, that will be two or three nights in Paramaribo, at hotel rates in the range of US\$ 70-80 per night (single or double room) at the *Eco Resort Inn* (<http://www.ecoresortinn.com>), with breakfast and airport shuttle pick-up and drop off included. Some US\$ 40 per day will cover costs for food and transport in Paramaribo. Participants do not need hotel arrangements during the stay in Brownsberg from Saturday morning August 15 until Tuesday afternoon August 18), since all costs in that period are included in the encounter. There are regular incoming international flights from Amsterdam, Aruba, Belem, Cayenne, Curacao, Miami, Georgetown and Port of Spain. It is recommendable to make reservations for travel well in advance, given the holiday season.

The costs for registration for the encounter are US\$ 700, with a discount for persons without institutional or other funding, who can contribute with US\$ 450. It includes the following:

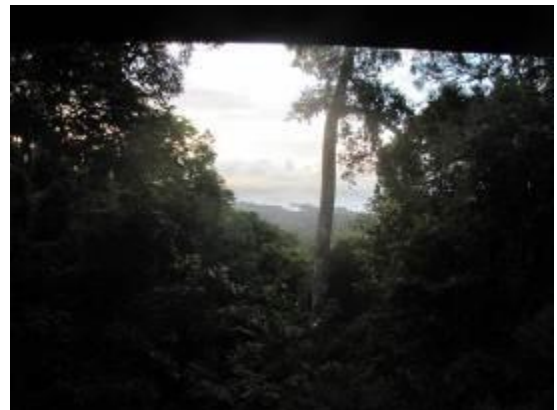
- (i) Encounter tuition fee
- (ii) Encounter documentation and material
- (iii) Welcome Dinner and Social Evening in Paramaribo on Friday, August 14
- (iv) Travel by bus to Brownsberg and back to Paramaribo
- (v) Lodging in Brownsberg from August 15-18 (three nights)
- (vi) All costs during the trip and the meeting in Brownsberg, including meals, drinks and planned activities.

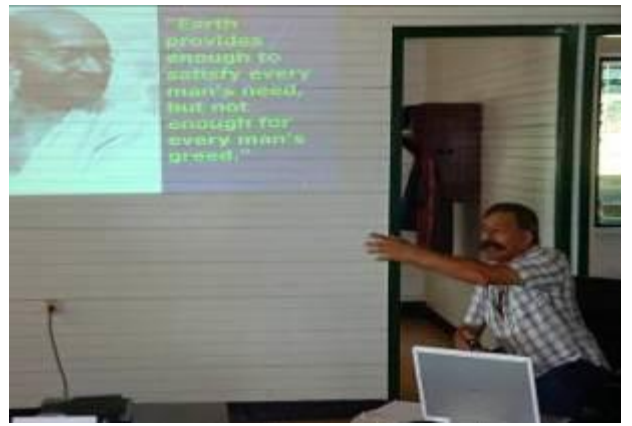
VII. OTHER INFORMATION

The seminar location, Brownsberg, is a malaria free area on an elevated plateau. Lodging and seminar sessions are in safe and healthy locations that need no special health measures related to risks for tropical diseases, according to official regulations and guidelines of the national authorities and of international health organizations. Persons who intend to extend their stay beyond the arrangements of the encounter, with trips on their own account to the far south of the country do require preventive medication, and should make the corresponding health inquiries.

A sweater and some warm clothes may be useful, since late night temperatures may drop to 20° C (68° F) when low clouds cross the mountain. Casual clothing, jeans, walking shoes, thick socks, long sleeve shirts or blouses are required for daytime and evening walks. Cameras will add to the encounter DVD, which volunteers will produce on the last night with pictures and videos by participants.

= Selection of pictures from previous encounters =

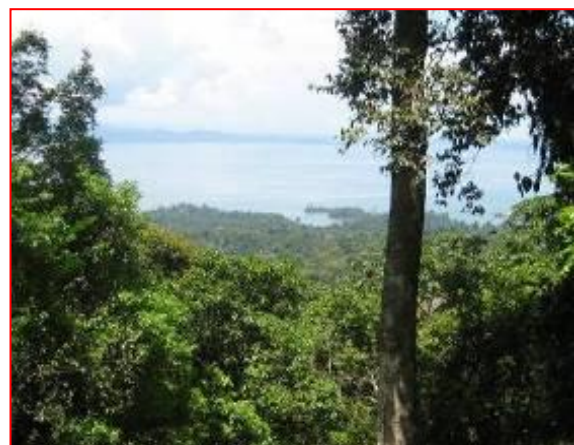




VIII. JOIN THE 2015 ENCOUNTER

The organizing committee of this open encounter welcomes critical thinkers, experts, scholars, activists of social movements, researchers, NGO staff and any other concerned dweller of planet Earth concerned with the future of humanity to join the encounter with presentations or by sharing their ideas in the discussions. Registration for the Encounter is now open and you can request your digital registration form by email with payment instructions at the Secretariat of the Encounter at crscenter@crscenter.com.

Time is long overdue to share reflections with peers in cross-fertilizing sessions for a better understanding of our dire conditions, to enhance the survival chances of humanity and to define strategies and actions to take command of our destiny. No longer can we leave the initiative in the hands of irresponsible and reckless and elites that do not shudder to sacrifice our life chances and the existence of future generations for the sake of selfish gain. “Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.” (Arundhati Roy) The paths of concerned people committed to rescue our future are bound to cross and merge in a synergetic force. In the last decade that has been happening on a small scale at the Amazon Forest Encounter.



“¡Caminante no hay camino; se hace camino al andar!” Antonio Machado
(“Wanderer, there is no road; you make the road as you go!”)