

Proposed Knowledge Sharing Presentation: The Shuar of Ecuador

Title of Proposed Knowledge Sharing Presentation: “The People of the Sacred Waterfalls: An Introduction to the Shuar of the Amazon”		
Project Contacts: Juan Carlos Jintiach: juancarlos@amazonalliance.org Craig Hammer craigsimonhammer@hotmail.com	Proposed Date of Presentation: May 2008	Presenters: Juan Carlos Jintiach (Shuar Community Leader and Co-Director of the Amazon Alliance) & Shaman Ricardo Tsakimp (Chief Uwishin/ Shaman of the Shuar and President, Association of Andean Shaman)
Key Issue(s) Targeted: Shuar History (spanning 5000 years); cultural traditions; contemporary lifestyle (“A Day in the Life of a Shuar Family”); interactive spiritual ceremony (including singing and chanting).		

CONTEXT

Goal. This proposal seeks to schedule a one-day knowledge-sharing presentation in English by Ricardo Tsakimp, the Shuar community’s most senior Shaman, and Juan Carlos Jintiach, a respected Shuar community leader in May 2008. The goal is to share cultural information with the the general public, to promote a better understanding of who the Shuar are, and what life is like in the Amazonian Basin. An additional desired effect is for the Shuar leadership to strengthen its relationship with local civil society organizations in the DC/Metro area, and to continue cross-cultural dialog.

Context. The Shuar are an indigenous community of 100,000+ members who live in a sovereign stretch of territory within southeastern Ecuador, between the upper mountains of the Andes and the Amazonian lowlands, between the Pastaza and Marañón Rivers, east of the present city of Cuenca (See “Appendix A: Map of Shuar Territory”). This territory is a mostly rocky region that covers approximately 25,000 square miles. The location of the Shuar's territory, which is largely sandwiched between an Andean escarpment to the west and unnavigable river waters to the east, has helped to protect the community from external interference. The Shuar are thus extremely independent. The Shuar are the second largest among the indigenous Amazonian groups. Until recently, external observers of the Shuar, including anthropologists and ethnographers, have referred to the Shuar as jívaros or jibaros, terms which likely derive from the 16th century Spanish spelling of “shuar.”

Innovation. The proposed presentation is *innovative* because it will achieve involvement, cooperation, and collaboration between the Shuar indigenous community and local civil society organizations (including advocacy groups for human rights, the Amazon Basin, general environmental protection, sustainable development, and more), and allow the general public to

engage and interact with a Lead Shaman of the Shuar (*Uwishin* Ricardo Tsakimp), and Shuar community leaders and cultural experts, including Juan Carlos Jintiach (See “Appendix B: Proposed Shuar Presenters”). Toward these objectives, the presentation will be designed to engage the public as full partners, and will apply “hands-on-learning,” including chanting and dancing, to better convey cultural information about the Shuar.

PRESENTATION

Project Description. The proposed knowledge-sharing presentation will be comprised of the following five (5) components:

1) Introduction: “Who are the Shuar?” The Shuar presenters will begin with a brief personal introduction, and discuss the history of the Shuar people. In the language of the Shuar, the word, ‘Shuar’ translates to mean the “people.” It is conservatively estimated that the Shuar have resided in the same part of what is now the Ecuadorian rainforest for approximately five thousand years, in many ways retaining certain cultural practices and beliefs. Their sovereign stretch of rainforest is home to a series of picturesque waterfalls, which are spiritual places for the Shuar, who have for thousands of years been known as “The People of the Waterfalls.” Additional information, such as Shuar creation legends, will be shared, and other pre-contact practices and beliefs, leading up to the 16th Century.

2) First Contact: “Repelling the Invading Conquistadors” The Shuar presenters will discuss the first contact between the Shuar and Spanish explorers and conquistadors. The Shuar first made contact with Spaniards in the 16th century and entered into peaceful trade relations. In 1599, when the Spanish governor sought to tax the settlers’ gold trade with the Shuar, the Shuar aggressively resisted. When Shuar leadership discovered that the Spanish governor’s own motives were highly unscrupulous, he was captured and punished: molten gold was poured down his throat. Following the execution of the Governor, the Shuar drove out or killed the remaining 25,000 – 30,000 Spanish settlers and burned the settlement to the ground, leaving a priest alive to tell the tale, to discourage further invasions. The Shuar are thus among the only indigenous populations in the Americas that have successfully revolted against the Spanish Empire, and they additionally thwarted all subsequent attempts by the Spanish to conquer them. The Shuar presenters will additionally explain the history of the *Tsantsa*, or the Shuar’s former practice of shrinking the heads of conquered enemies. Please note that *no graphic details, imagery, or information* will figure into the presentation, since children will very likely present in the audience.

3) Shamanism: “The Beliefs and Practices of the People of the Sacred Waterfalls” Ricardo Tsakimp, Lead Shaman for all the Shuar, will discuss how Shamanism is an important aspect of historical – and present-day – Shuar culture. Shamans, or *Uwishin* in the Shuar language, are believed to be able to possess good magic and manipulate *tsentsak*, or a spiritual type of invisible, animate dart that acts only when directed to do so. By accumulating the *tsentsak*, the Shuar believe they can protect themselves from, as well as attack, their enemies. It is believed that the ability to control *tsentsak* can be attained by ingesting *natem* (typically *Banisteriopsis caapi*, a jungle vine of the family *Malpighiaceae*). *Natem* is used to prepare *Ayahuasca*, a medicinal decoction and “plant teacher” that is still practiced as a religious sacrament among the Shuar. Lead Shaman Ricardo Tsakimp will also perform rituals (without ingesting *Ayahuasca*) for the general public, including singing, dancing, and chanting, and teach members of the audience sacred Shuar prayers. He will

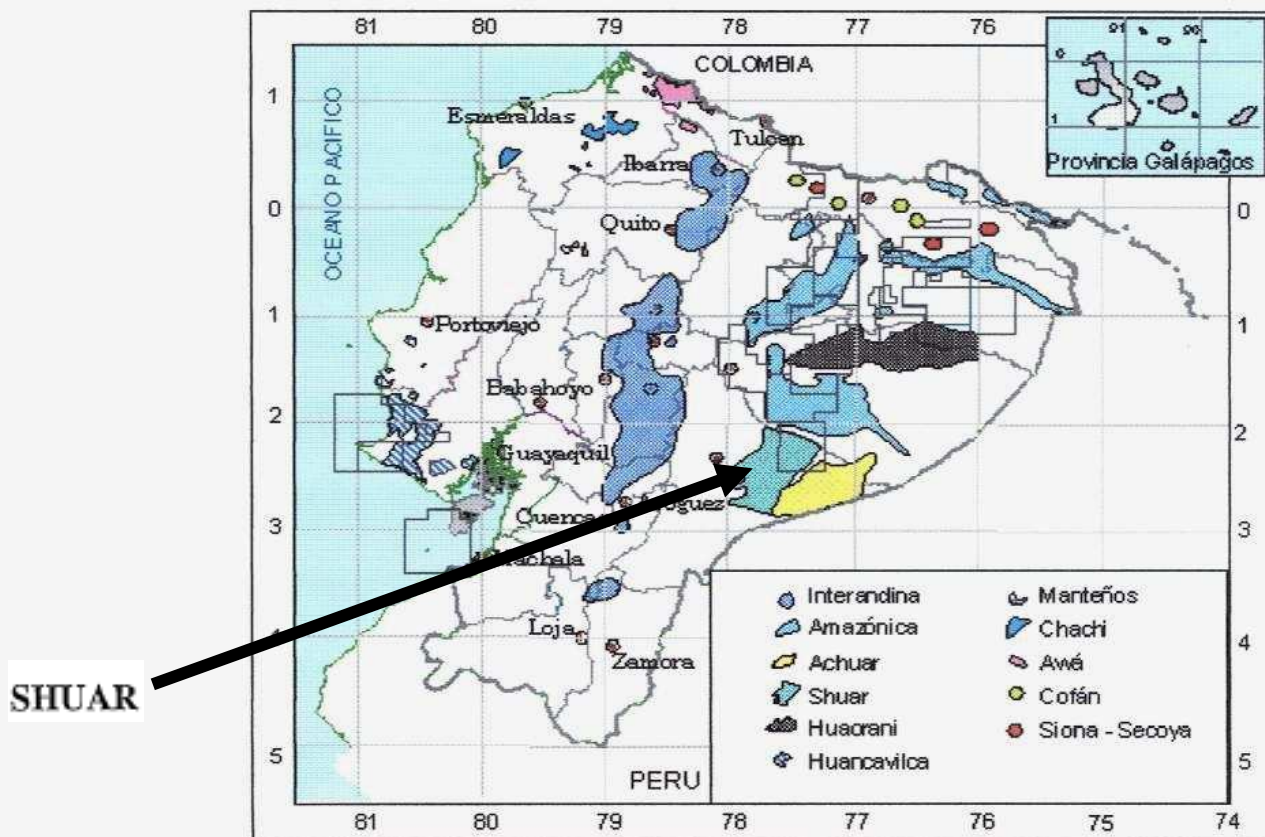
bring cultural items (nothing dangerous or which might otherwise be confused with an illegal substance) that he uses during blessing rituals, such as headdresses and other Shamanic attire and accoutrements, and show the audience how they are used. He will also stress the importance of respecting other cultures, and encourage the audience to see that despite differing practices, beliefs, dress, and language, the Shuar believe in the interconnectedness of all people.

4) The Shuar in the 21st Century: “A Day in the Life of a Shuar Family” The Shuar presenters will discuss what it means to be a member of the Shuar indigenous community in this day and age. They will explain current Shuar practices and the roles of each member of a Shuar family. They will explain that Shuar life centers on an autonomous household consisting of a man, his wife (or two wives), unmarried sons, and daughters. Sons leave their natal households when they become married; sons-in-law move into the households of in-laws upon marriage. Men hunt and women garden. When boys reached the age of eight years, their fathers or uncles would lead them on a days-long journey to a nearby place of cultural importance, such as a waterfall. The boy would drink only tobacco water, and would be given *maikua* (typically *Datura arborea*, Solanaceae), to encourage the *arútam*, or the seeing of a vision. Shuar culture holds that these visions are produced by a *wakani* (ancestral spirit) and that the bravest of boys were able to touch the *arútam*, and thus acquire the *arútam wakani*, or a spiritual power that provides protection. This practice was intended to strengthen Shuar boys, both spiritually and physically, throughout the arduous journey. It is believed that the possession of several *arútam wakani* would provide a form of spiritual protection that approximates invincibility. The Shuar believe that if a person who is in possession of an *arútam wakani* dies a peaceful death a new *wakani*, or benevolent soul, will be created, and if someone in possession of an *arútam wakani* dies prematurely or violently, a *muísak*, a powerful, vengeful spirit, is created. Additional information about how the Shuar’s beliefs are reconciled with the modern age will be discussed. A discussion will also be held on the Shuar’s current system of community government (through leadership and elder councils) will also be briefly discussed.

5) Q & A with the Shuar Leadership: “Answering Your Questions.” The Shuar presenters will conclude the knowledge-sharing exercise by taking questions from the audience.

Target Audience. The proposed presentation will be geared toward members of the general public (including children), who have no previous knowledge of the Shuar. The presentation will be in English, with Shuar chanting and singing, and the presenters will invite members of the audience to chant, sing, and to dance with them. Again, the presenters will refrain from providing graphic details (concerning, for example, 16th Century battles with Spanish Conquistadors or the process of head shrinking) in the presence of children. The presenters will also bring cultural items, but refrain from bringing dangerous items (such as spears, hunting darts, or blow guns) or spiritual decoctions (such as *Ayahuasca*) to promote the safety of the audience.

APPENDIX A: MAP OF SHUAR TERRITORY



Location of Indigenous Tribes of Ecuador

APPENDIX B: PROPOSED SHUAR PRESENTERS

1. **JUAN CARLOS JINTIACH**, is President of the Shuar Nation Corporation (Shuar Territory, Ecuador). He is a Shuar community leader who has been authorized by the community to speak on their behalf. Mr. Jintiach has been deeply involved with the operational work of the Federacion Interprovincial de Centros Shuar (the “FISCH”) as well as with the work of *Confenie* and *Conaie*. He is Co-Director of the Amazon Alliance, a Fellow of the Institute for Human Rights, Peace and Development, and has been a significant figure in working through the strategies of how to protect and promote eco-social responsibility, and bio-diversity policies not simply for the Shuar in Ecuador, but more generally on a national and regional basis. Mr. Jintiach reached out to Professor Winston Nagan and Craig Hammer in 2002 to devise methods to protect the culture, human rights, and land patrimony of the Shuar. At the suggestion of Mr. Jintiach, the team worked closely to develop a Shuar Bill of Fundamental Rights based on the fundamental principles encoded in the Ecuador Constitution as well as that States’ international commitments to the rights of indigenous peoples and human rights in general. The final Bill of Rights is based in part on Shuar customary law, Ecuadorian human rights law and appropriate provisions in the then Draft Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Specific components of that document included one of the most crucial concepts involved in the protection of the ecosystem of the Rain Forest. The Grand Assembly adopted the Bill of Rights in 2002.

2. **RICARDO TSAKIMP**, is President of the Shamans Association of the Andes. He is Lead Shaman for the Shuar, and is a traditional healer. He is a repository of deep knowledge of both plant and plant combinations for medicinal purposes, as well as of spiritual value to the Shuar.

3. **OTHER SHUAR PRESENTERS: TBA**

APPENDIX C: SHUAR PRO BONO REPRESENTATIVES

- 1. WINSTON P. NAGAN**, is Procurador Judicial (Abogado Defensor) and Sam T. Dell Research Scholar Professor of Law at the University of Florida Levin College of Law. He is also the Director of the Institute for Human Rights, Peace and Development and former Chairman of the Board of Amnesty International USA. He is also a former acting High Court Justice of the High Court of South Africa (Cape Division). He is the lead legal representative of the SNC.
- 2. CRAIG HAMMER, ESQ**, is Asóciate Procurador Judicial (Abogado Defensor) and Senior Fellow of the Institute for Human Rights, Peace and Development. He is a Program Coordinator for the World Bank in Washington DC. He is a pro bono associate legal representative of the Shuar indigenous community. His pro bono representation of and work with the Shuar in no way implicates or conflicts with his work at the World Bank.