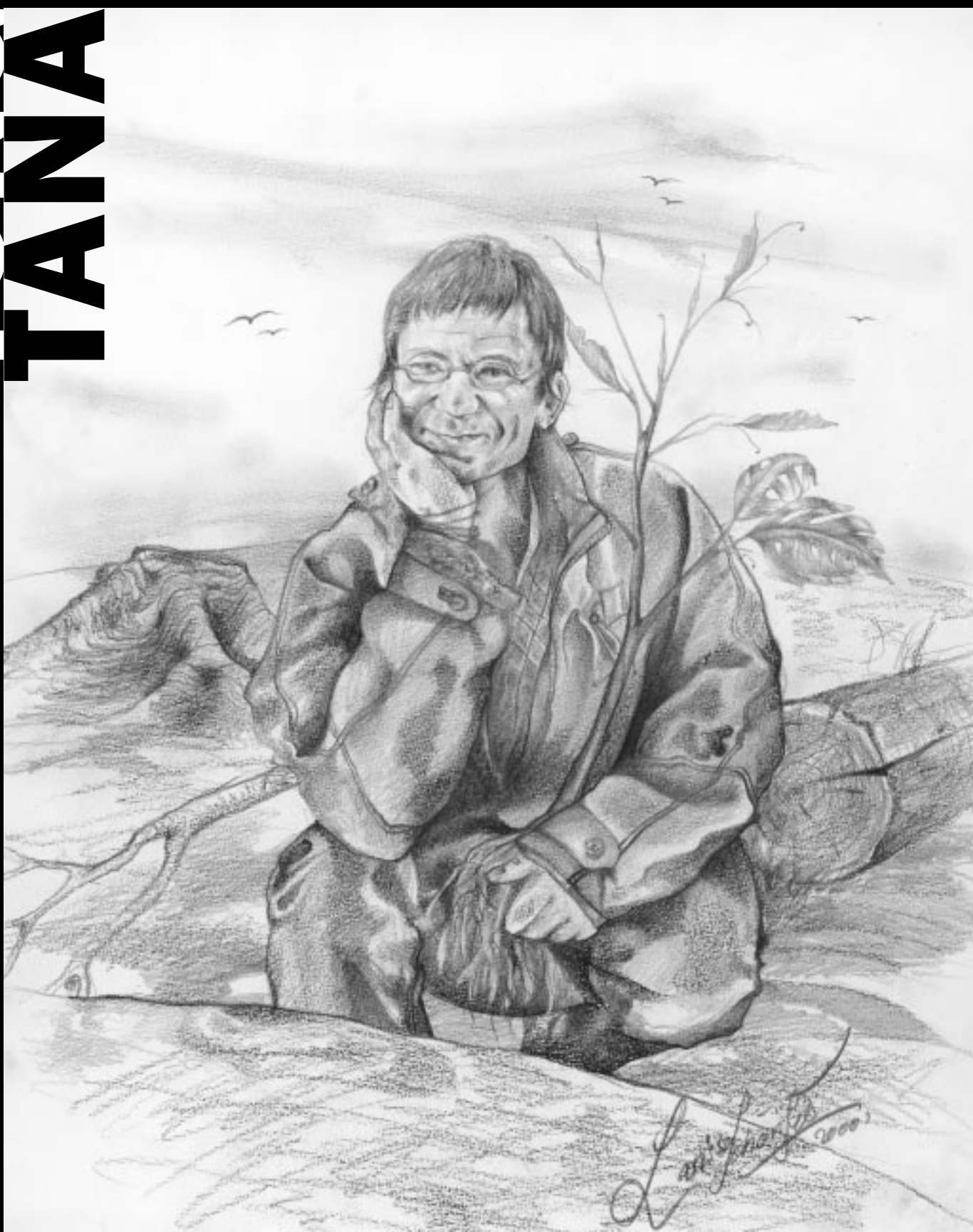


December 2000

Journal on rainforests,
indigenous rights and timber trade

TONG TANA

Bruno-Manser-Fonds



Dear Bruno,

Where are you? Are you alive? Did something happen to you on your hike through the jungle? Did you perish in your beloved forest? Did loggers, soldiers, police capture you? Did they kill you? Or are you acting from a secluded place? Is your disappearance part of a desperate attempt to save that part of the remaining forest which can still be saved for your Penan friends?

We sang for the last time in the crypt of the Leonhard church in February. Our farewell was different from other times. You must have laughed your own laugh when we spoke of your guardian angels. But your laugh left everything open. You left the time of your return open. You talked about shooting a film in the Indonesian part of Borneo. You left open what would follow. But: if nothing happens now, if the protected area which had long since been foreseen would not be created, the last virgin rainforest in Sarawak, the culture of the Penan, will be lost. Irrevocably.

You always go to the bottom of things, with all your alert senses. On our hikes you show me how much hidden life lived under the rocks. The blue fluorescence in the stream in a Tuscanese forest does not let you go until you know its cause – the volatile oils seeping from your freshly peeled stick, colouring the water blue. Your entire youth is spent in unwavering preparation for your task. You draw up your own education made to measures, which enables you to survive in the wilderness. There where others stop, the challenge begins for you. You go to the limits and sometimes a little further. Do you remember the steep incline 8 meters high between the stream bed and the path on our mule hike in Ticino? All the others want to give up, to accept the long detour. Not you. You look intently at the slope, whisper something in the mule's ear, and off you go: whirling mule legs, Bruno dancing somewhere around the struggling animal, and – you are at the top. Or the fasting campaign in Bern: after 2 months of fasting you also stop drinking, hoping that the authorities would give in to your demand for an import stop for wood from Sarawak. Only the thought of your dear mother Ida can bring you back from gently drifting over to the other world.

A sentence of yours keeps coming into my mind: "You have to go for something dear to your heart totally, from the top of your head to the soles of your feet." Time and again your way of being involved is misunderstood. Many see above all the adventurer who seeks a kick from spectacular actions. That's you as well, of course. But they forget what you do it for. You have had to experience how the livelihood of a people, who offer you a second home and who have lived in harmony with nature since ancient times, is being taken away. And they forget that this is also the basis

of our livelihood. And how your struggle of many years, although it finds a lot of support, makes headlines and helps change our consumer behaviour, does not help the Penan. And how it is becoming ever more difficult to make your concerns heard over the din of the daily flood of information, in a world in which most people suppress and keep putting off the truly existential problems. You are always looking for new ideas on how to remind the public of the desperate situation your friends are in, how you could bring your fellow humans to act. So I hope that your disappearance is a new plan of yours to get the Penan back into the public attention before the last virgin forests are cut down.

Your total commitment has also made you tired, although you have always pulled yourself together again. How you yearned for a long time without dates, talks, actions and paperwork. How you yearned for a long time in the forest, observing, drawing. Your conscience has allowed you few breaks. You often dragged correspondence, which you still wanted to answer, with you in your huge rucksack.

I dreamed three times of you during the past months. Every time you came back without a rucksack, relaxed, happy and laughed at me with your giggling laugh for being concerned about you. If you were not alive anymore, these dreams will comfort me. And yet: how lovely if they would announce your return back into this world. Do come back.

A loving hug, Martin – for family and friends

Tong Tana

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Bruno and Penans, 1999

Message by 17 Penan leaders

23rd November 2000

On behalf of the Penan people in Sarawak we write to all of you including relatives and friends of Bruno. We the Penan are his best brothers and sisters and friends with whom he stayed 6 years. Even though he is from another part of the world, we are very close to him, we treat him as our great grandparent and great leader.

He has now been missing for a few months. When we first heard the message of his missing, we all were worried and felt sad and lonely. However we keep on praying every time and ask for his safety. And we continue to search for him since the beginning until now, we will continue and try our best.

Here once again we want to remind you all brothers, sisters and friends: whatever happened to him, please don't give up. Continue the struggle and carry on his good work until we can gain the victory for his behalf and our people. We are putting a great hope on you all to continue to support us in this situation.

Keep strong, all of us should continue his vision hand in hand. Even though he is no more to be seen, in our heart and mind he is still with us and shares everything with us. We hope he is still alive and will returns to us again.

Whenever we think of him, we feel sad and lonely. Because we put our hope in him as a great person to bring change for our people and the world one day. Now we hope you all are still standing beside us with great spirit.

Mountain and sea are between us and keep us apart, but in our heart and struggle we are one and close to you. We promised to ourselves to keep this struggle continuing and to remember him in our life forever until our next generations.

We hope people all over the world are putting pressure on Taib Mahmud and the Malaysian authorities and logging companies because of his disappearance.

We hope more people visit the place where he went missing and help us search, though for sure the authorities must blame us for this, but we hope you all will support us.

These are our words We are still strong and speak with one voice.

We the 17 headmen having signed above on behalf of all Penan communities in Sarawak with one heart and struggle to assert our support and keep on our fight to continue his mission and vision.

May God hold his hand and keep him alive.

Concerning the promised reservation for the Penan: Please sign the enclosed letter and send it to the given addressee, directly, and a copy to the Council of Europe. Thank you.

Where is Bruno Manser?

rs – What has happened to Bruno Manser? The family, the Bruno-Manser-Fonds (BMF) and all the close friends of this rain forest protector from Basel are and have been very worried during the last few months. The above question has still not been answered. What are the known facts? The 46-year-old human rights activist disappeared on the island of Borneo in the Malaysian state of Sarawak. In spring this year he wanted to reach the Penan forest nomads surrounded by loggers, army and police, via Indonesian Kalimantan over jungle paths. That was the last anybody heard of and from him.

Bruno Manser spent six years with the last of the nomadic living Penan, from 1984–1990, learnt their language, their knowledge and their survival tactics as hunters and gatherers, wrote about their way of living and made drawings of them. This white man became one of them and was given the name “Laki Penan”, the “Penan Man”.

High prestige amongst the nomadic Penan

This Swiss Penan had high prestige amongst the nomadic Penan. He did as they do, moved around the jungle naked, knew the animals and the fruit of the jungle, used the blowpipe to hunt and realised as one of the first people to do so, that organised protest was necessary to protect the vital basis of survival of the Penan from the growing noise of motor saws and bulldozers gradually coming closer.

Slowly these until then unknown people were troubled and cut off by logging roads constructed by the logging companies under the blessing of the government. Through non-violent actions and uncomfortable pin-pricks these original inhabitants protested against the technological progress of civilised destruction and attracted, toward the late 1980s, Western interest in Sarawak issues.

For the endangered Penan and later on world-wide Bruno Manser became a symbol for the protest against the unscrupulous destruction of Sarawak’s rain forests. He also started becoming an antagonistic nuisance in the eyes of Sarawak’s Chief Minister Taib Mahmud. On 15th February 2000, just before he left, Bruno Manser told OnlineReports: “Through his logging licence policies Taib Mahmud is personally responsible for nearly the whole area of the rain forests of Sarawak having become one big field of destruction in the matter of one generation.”

Declared as “enemy of the state”

In 1990 rainforest protector Bruno Manser had to leave the Penan – his “second family” – and the country. Malaysia had declared this Swiss as “enemy of

the state no. 1” and sent out special units looking for him.

But Manser didn’t give up. The Bruno-Manser-Fonds was founded in Basel and an office set up with the help of many sponsors. Through the work led by its secretaries Roger Graf and later John Künzli it became a recognised center of activities in rain forest issues. Manser himself contributed to raising consciousness in the Swiss media for climate and rain forest topics through his calm and convincing manner. This stubborn man often pushed himself over his physical and psychological limits. In 1993 he did a 60-day hunger strike in front of the Bundeshaus in Bern to raise consciousness in the Federal Council and among Swiss consumers for the necessity of a compulsory declaration of all woods and an import embargo of tropical woods. This strike was supported by 37 organisations and political parties, the parliament of the town of Basel and many well known persons, and later created quite a stir. But Switzerland to this day still has no compulsory declaration.

Bruno Manser tried to fight against the fast destruction of the rain-forests and held many lectures in Switzerland and abroad, made contact to NGOs, the EU, UNO, governments, unmasked offenders and participated in other activities. But these small successes were too little, too slow for this man who always felt in direct contact to the Penan.

“I am tired but I can’t stop”

He suffered. Already in May 1998 he said: “As long as logging goes on in Sarawak and as long as the bulldozers continue their destruction our activities will not have achieved anything. I am tired but I can’t stop until all the Malaysian promises have been kept, namely the right of self-determination for the Penan and the protection of their environment in a biosphere reservation promised in 1987.”

The rain-forests had deeply become a part of him. He visited American and African jungles and stayed there for weeks. Undercover he managed to get through to Sarawak several times to see his friends again, who were expecting him. Every time he yet again witnessed the lightning fast destruction of their precious environment mainly by the logging companies Samling Co, Rimbunan Hijau Sdn. Bhd. and W.T.K.: uprooted original inhabitants, new roads, cleared landscapes, eroded mountains, lifeless rivers, extinct plants and animals. Manser knew time was running out for the Penan and the forest.

Middle 1998 he decided to risk everything. Starting diplomatically, he offered Chief Minister Taib Mahmud his co-operation in founding the biosphere reservation and to forgive him for having broken Malaysian

immigration laws. No reaction. All following endeavours to achieve communications with Mahmud were equally unsuccessful.

Bruno Manser then learnt to parachute in record time. He planned to deliver a lamb, "Gumperli", out of the air as a symbol of reconciliation to the Chief Minister on the Hari Ray peace day festival at the end of the Ramadan month in Kuching. The Malaysian Embassy in Geneva put pressure on the airline companies not to transport the lamb, hereby this endeavour was also hindered. Manser then jumped with the animal on 6th April 1998 over the UNO in Geneva in his desperation to draw attention to the situation in Sarawak.

Turns above the Taib residence in a motorised glider

Once again no reaction from Kuching, the capital of Sarawak. In March 1999 the customs officers in Kuching let a small, athletic businessman enter wearing his father's business suit, carrying a briefcase and wearing a badly knotted tie. On March 29th 1999 Bruno Manser flew a couple of highly publicized turns above the Taib residence in a motorised glider in honour of the return of the pilgrims from Mecca. Intentionally landing next to the residence he let himself be arrested after which he was immediately transported to Kuala Lumpur and later deported to Switzerland. His humorous, risky and naive goal to convince Chief Minister Taib Mahmud of the necessity of protecting the rain-forest was once again unsuccessful.

Manser left for Borneo on the 15th February 2000 fearing that the last remains of the Penan forest would be sacrificed to the logging industry. BMF secretary John Künzli and a Swedish film team joined him in Kaliman-

tan. This film team had already shot the film "Tong Tana" with him and now wanted to film him on his way through the jungle to Sarawak. They then left and Künzli and Manser carried on alone. By the time John had to leave, Bruno was still writing postcards to his friends as usual. This time he wrote almost 400 cards. Bruno Manser then entrusted himself to a Swiss who knew his way around the territory. The trip took two tiring weeks. First by boat, then heavily burdened on foot in virgin forest, where it rained every day. Arriving near the border they were totally exhausted. On May 18th Bruno Manser gave his returning countryman a letter for his life-partner, in which he wrote about diarrhoea and a broken rib.

According to John Künzli, Bruno Manser must have passed the forested border to Sarawak on 22nd May with the help of a local guide. Last contact to him was in a town called Bareo. Here he wrote a letter to his girl-friend while hiding in a bush near the town. He was very tired and was waiting for darkness before continuing along the logging roads. Künzli believes this letter was brought to the post office in Bareo by some unknown person. It reached Switzerland with Malaysian stamps on it but no post office stamp.

Since then the BMF office in Basel has been trying to make contact with Manser through all means available, i.e. trusted contacts and other often malfunctioning means of communication to find out where he is. All without any success. The Penan had also sent out groups searching discretely for him in the forest, in the cleared areas and around the source of the Limbang river which he had originally been heading for. Two indigenous men were found who said they had guided him for some days on Sarawak territory in the jungle.

Bruno before entering Sarawak



Relatives and friends are worried

There is no more concrete information. A petition, written by the Limbang nomads on Malaysian territory and sent in July to the Chief Minister could be a clue. What of the unexpected road block by the Penan on August 11th near Long Kevok? There had not been such an activity since the 1980s. Is the Swiss "Laki Penan" behind this new wave of protest? Has Bruno Manser gone into hiding intentionally?

In September there were rumours that Manser was in the area. He was also said to have been shot by the army at the road block in Long Kevok. But the Swiss parachute teacher and good friend of Manser's flew on the 21st October into the Bario region where Bruno had last been seen. All those asked said that they knew nothing about him.

Several options

Imaginable are many possibilities:

- Bruno Manser could be hiding to make himself available to the Penan during their last protest efforts and to help make the world aware of what was going on in Sarawak. Known as a lone fighter, someone who sometimes threw the worries of his friends into the wind and who often took great risks, this possibility is not all that unlikely. What is different this time is that none of his family or close friends have heard from him. That has never happened before. Irrespective of the situations he found himself in the past he always managed to get some message through to them. His mother told OnlineReports: "No, no, he has never been gone so long without sending some signs of his still being alive." His brothers and sisters and friends confirm this experience. Therefore they are scared something really bad has happened.
- Bruno Manser is lying sick or hurt in the home of some nomadic family. Rock falls are a common occurrence in the jungle of Sarawak, as are many other dangers such as malaria, infections, snake bites and all other kinds of accidents. This is the reason even the Penan rarely go alone through the jungle, something that Manser had to do repeatedly to reach them. On the other hand, the fact that none of the Penan searching for him found him, speaks against this possibility. He is an experienced bush trekker and survival expert, has an iron determination and is in good physical condition. He can move well on the land and thanks to his hunting and collecting skills will very unlikely experience hunger.
- Bruno Manser is in prison. Because he was moving along known logging roads in a territory under great military and police surveillance an imprisonment must be taken into account. If so, the possibility that this is being kept strictly secret to avoid any international attention is quite realistic.

- Bruno Manser wants to stay invisible and has asked some of the around 9000 Penan (of which at the most 300 still live as nomads) to keep him hidden. This version is supported by the sudden escalation of protest manifestations after some years of relative peace in the region. Roger Graf's sound knowledge of the Penan as a people who are not secretive speaks against it. If Manser were in hiding somewhere, some information would definitely have seeped through by now.
- Bruno Manser is dead. The jungle he aimed for is dangerous. Additionally to all the natural dangers, the possibility of murder must be taken into account as well. He is still a wanted man with a bounty price waiting for anyone bringing him in. Especially the army and police stationed in the area could be very interested in the death of this uncomfortable Swiss. The enraged loggers and their clients are another great danger and would gladly make use of the first opportunity to get rid of this hated activist, say those who know the circumstances well.

Swiss diplomats involved

Now Swiss diplomats are trying to find out what has happened to Bruno Manser. As OnlineReports informed already on 18th November, the BMF has informed the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (EDA). On 20th November Manser's family requested the EDA to officially report Bruno Manser missing and to ask the Malaysian authorities for help. On the same day, Associated Press Malaysia distributed the news that still in October Bruno Manser had sent e-mails to an anonymous friend. The BMF office takes this information for very unlikely: During all his life Bruno has not made use of a computer and never sent an e-mail. This work was done by the office for him. Furthermore, the region where Manser disappeared is hardly developed, lacks electricity and phone lines. Yet, it is not totally impossible that Bruno Manser got in contact with someone, but as long as this "friend" does not show himself, his information cannot be verified and it is even thinkable that it is a deliberately spread misinformation!

In the meantime, the destroyer of Borneo's rain-forests have also heard about the media activities around Bruno Manser's fate. Malaysian newspaper write that the police and some politicians deny the possibility of the Swiss' entry into Sarawak. Should this notwithstanding be the case, Manser is "advised" to get away immediately and not to stir up the Penan against the government's development measures ...

This report and the following interview were kindly put at BMF's disposal by the Internet Information Service www.OnlineReports.ch. They were slightly shortened and updated by the BMF.

“Success in Sarawak is less than zero”

pk – The environmental activist Bruno Manser from Basle has been struggling for years against the clearcutting of the rainforests in Sarawak by making spectacular actions. His aim: to preserve the basis of the Penan people’s livelihood, the forest.

I visited the Penan this year (1999) because they had called me. These nomadic people live in the Malaysian state of Sarawak on the island of Borneo. There are 9,000 people in the whole tribe, 250 of whom are still completely nomadic. Their forest is being destroyed for years by logging. Over 70 percent of the rainforest has been cut down in Sarawak during the past 20 years. But this land on which the Penan live, which provides their daily nourishment, is the only thing they have. And the only man who could effect something quickly is the Chief Minister of Sarawak, Abdul Taib Mahmud: he could withdraw the clearcutting licences which he had given to his friends and could place the remaining forest areas under protection – if he wishes to.

“I was looking for a self-sufficient people”

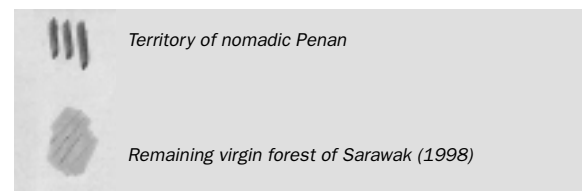
When I did the “matura” in Basel I already knew that I didn’t want to study. I much rather wanted to acquire knowledge about everything we needed for our daily life. From 1973 to 1984 I educated myself in practical handicrafts courses as a bricklayer, welder, bee keeper, and I learned how to weave cloth and forge a knife.

At that time the wish arose in me to get to know a people who lived self-sufficiently and without money within their own freely developed culture. I began my search until an inner voice led me to Borneo to the Penan. In 1984 I set off with my rucksack, compass, hammock, bush knife, roof cover, shampoo and Muesli. I wanted to stay for three years; I finally stayed for six years.

During my years in the jungle I used all the means that the indigenous people used. I fished with a casting net and also hunted birds and wild boar with spear, shotgun, blowpipe and poison arrows. I needed five years to become adept at surviving in the jungle and I learned how to process the Penan’s staple food, sago.

Several thousand square kilometers of rainforest destroyed in twenty years

I finally had to force myself to leave the country, as NGOs as well as the Penan asked me to take action outside the country. In this way I was drawn into peaceful resistance. In 1990 I secretly left Sarawak in order to bring the message of the Penan onto the international stage.



In the meantime the authorities of all civilized countries have indeed declared their sympathy for the struggle against the injustices. In Sarawak success is less than zero. During the past twenty years thousands of square kilometers of forest have been eradicated together with their ecological treasures. Centuries old giant trees are brutally felled, later ending up as parquet floor blocks, door frames and garden benches in our homes.

In most cases the international trading companies are responsible for the violation of human rights and environmental destruction in the third world. More transparency is needed in trade, including a mandatory declaration of wood products. Whatever we eat or buy: we should give preference to the products from our surroundings.

The European Parliament had written a resolution (already in 1988) requesting an import moratorium for wood from Sarawak into EU states – but not a single member has yet put the resolution into force. The only measurable success are the 240 communities in Switzerland, encompassing 2,5 million inhabitants, who have decided to use no more wood from the last remaining virgin forests.

“I speak and used to think in the language of the Penan”

I would have given up long ago if I hadn't felt for the Penan in my heart. It is the personal relationship with these people, deprived of their rights, which gives me



Batu Lawi

this strength. I speak their language and used to think in their language.

As long as a small piece of paradise remains I will commit myself to its preservation – by carrying out actions as I did recently by hang-gliding down near the private residence of the Chief Minister in Kuching. I am someone who goes to the limit taking risks in action. But I don't regard myself as an exhibitionist – only as a catalyst for focussing attention on those who are actually responsible. Luckily I am not alone – thanks to the help of many friends and all those who act concretely.

If any success would be achieved at all and the last piece of virgin rainforest could still be preserved in time, I would once again dedicate myself to pursuing things which also interest me. It is possible that I may even found a family – who knows!

Forest destruction in Penan land, 1999

