

New Documentary Explores What America Could Learn from Its Former Enemies

BELFAST, ME, UNITED STATES, July 3, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A documentary examining social programs in regions once considered adversaries to the United States has been selected for 21 international film festivals and received 13 awards. "Saving Walden's World," created by former military engineer Jim Merkel, recently screened in Burlington, Vermont, winning the Vermont Public Award for Best Documentary. The film was also selected for the Whistleblower Summit and Film Festival.



Saving Walden's World is a documentary film that explores sustainable lifestyles in foreign countries.

Merkel designed military equipment in the 1980s before his worldview changed during the Iran-Contra hearings in 1987. "I was destabilizing countries, pumping up factions that were favorable to U.S. business interests," Merkel said. The turning point came in 1989, while in Stockholm, marketing encryption devices used in the Iran-Contra affair. "Something snapped," Merkel recalls. "I began questioning everything."

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Jim Merkel, filmmaker, author and activist

Instead of examining Nordic countries typically studied for social programs, Merkel investigated places his former work had specifically targeted: Cuba, Kerala (a state in India), and Slovenia. The documentary explores how these

regions provide comprehensive social services despite economic constraints.

In Cuba, even with a crippling US-imposed economic embargo, women hold 55.7% of parliament seats. Nearly 87% of women have their family planning needs met with modern methods. Recent partnerships have increased women's participation in cooperatives by 29% and their representation in leadership roles by 50%. Hosts of social programs and advances in gender equality have resulted in Cuba outperforming the USA in terms of infant mortality, literacy, and

longevity.

Kerala's Kudumbashree program has established networks of women-led cooperatives that address poverty while fostering economic independence. These regions offer services including free college, healthcare, and childcare. Kerala's multidimensional poverty rate decreased to 0.55 percent in 2023, with the government aiming to reduce the poverty rate to zero by November of this year. The multifaceted poverty rate in the USA stands at 13 percent. Slovenia was named the European Green Capital in 2016 and committed to reducing its ecological footprint by 20% by 2030. Slovenia has also emphasized gender parity and a comprehensive social safety net, resulting in an infant mortality rate at just 1.5 deaths per 1000 live births. The USA rate at 5.6 deaths per 1,000 live births should alarm anyone who cares about the well-being of their children. Merkel states, "With half the wealth per capita, Slovenia outperforms us." If nothing else, it begs the question, what more could the USA be doing for its people?

The film began as an exploration of how to save the world for future generations; however, what was discovered was that powerful women reduce infant mortality, poverty, and family size, while increasing longevity.

The documentary identifies women's empowerment as the common factor connecting the success stories of all the regions.

The documentary poses one question: "Are there dividends to society from ensuring all have a decent life?" Merkel describes his film as "an olive branch to the RED STATE/BLUE STATE divide."



Jim Merkel was inspired by his son Walden to contribute to social change by making a documentary film



Jim conducts an interview in Cuba with cameraman, Bob Maraist

To capture this story, Academy Award-winning filmmaker Deborah Shaffer directed the Cuba segments. Producer and researcher Dr. Santhi Rajasekhar was key to the Kerala segments. The production team also included Emmy-winning cinematographers Robert Maraist and David Wright, who have collaborated with Morgan Spurlock and Barbara Kopple and have filmed around the globe.

The film recently traveled across America in an electric vehicle and is currently available for community and virtual screenings worldwide through savingwaldensworld.org.

Jim Merkel

Saving Walden's World

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