



ASIA INDIGENOUS PEOPLES PACT FOUNDATION

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PRESS STATEMENT ON THE OCCASION OF THE

International Day of Forests, 21 March 2015

UPSCALE THE RECOGNITION OF LAND RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AS KEY TO FOREST-BASED SOLUTIONS TO CLIMATE CHANGE

For Immediate Release

21 March 2015

Forest is the lifeline and cultural heritage of more than 100 million indigenous peoples in Asia. According to the World Bank Study “The Role of Indigenous Peoples in Biodiversity Conservation: the Natural but Often Forgotten Partners” *traditional indigenous territories encompass up to 22 percent of the world’s land surface and they coincide with areas that hold 80% of the planet’s biodiversity.* This is the result of indigenous peoples’ historical stewardship and practice of low carbon and sustainable management of forests as their territory. However, the legal recognition of indigenous peoples as distinct from the majority of the population, and the entitlement to collective rights to their lands, territories and resources under international human rights standards continue to be denied by many states. Massive logging, expansion of palm oil plantations and wide-scale mono cropping, conversion of forestlands to commercial and destructive projects still prevail. These are taking place inspite of the serious problem of global carbon emission (around 20% of the total) arising from the deforestation and forest degradation, which are major causes of climate change.

On the other hand, the traditional livelihoods of indigenous peoples such as shifting cultivation/rotational agriculture, gathering of non-forest timber products and hunting are being blamed as serious causes of deforestation and forest degradation. Despite the fact that evidence-based studies demonstrate the contrary, 10 countries in Asia have policies prohibiting or phasing out shifting cultivation/rotational agriculture resulting to food insecurity, malnutrition, loss of biodiversity and traditional knowledge, and violations of civil and political rights. Indigenous peoples who are practicing their traditional livelihoods relating to forest are arrested, detained and unjustly penalized.

The Asia and Pacific Forest Hero in 2013, Mr. Preecha Siri, an indigenous Karen leader from Thailand said, ***“Forests are the source of culture and livelihoods of indigenous peoples. They are our identities. On the International Day of Forests, take action for forests, indigenous peoples and climate!”***

Whereas there are already milestone advances in the legal recognition of the land and forest rights of indigenous peoples such as in the Philippines, India, Cambodia, Malaysia and Indonesia, the implementation of these progressive laws remains weak, problematic, inappropriate, and even enables more land grabbing and/or individualization of collective lands in many cases. The lack of political will of states to fully respect and recognize the land rights of indigenous peoples remains a major obstacle in the sustainable management of forests and in ensuring the success of REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation of developing countries) as climate change mitigation measure. Although the REDD+ Cancun agreement includes social and environmental safeguards, the formulation of REDD+ national strategies and action plans by states in many countries does not harmonize with their laws and policies in line with the Cancun REDD+ safeguards including respect for the rights of indigenous peoples as affirmed by the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

On the occasion of International Day of Forest, the international community needs to recognize the



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collective rights and the vital role and contributions of indigenous peoples in sustainable forest management. Further, the international community should decisively address the real causes of deforestation and forest degradation instead of putting the blame on indigenous peoples and local communities. Joan Carling, the Secretary General of AIPP says ***“It is urgent to upscale the recognition of the forest rights of indigenous peoples through the demarcation and proper implementation of laws recognizing the collective land rights of indigenous peoples. Securing indigenous peoples’ customary land rights and sustainable livelihoods is necessary for the success of forest-based solutions to climate change and for sustainable development.”***

As part of the celebration of the International Day of Forest, AIPP further calls the attention of Asian governments to:

- **Immediately undertake necessary policy reforms to recognize and protect the land and forest rights of indigenous peoples including the sustainable livelihoods of indigenous peoples such as shifting cultivation/ rotational agriculture, and gathering of non-timber forest products.**
- **Immediately implement in partnership with indigenous peoples and other stakeholders the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) and FAO Voluntary Guidelines on the responsible governance of tenure of land, fisheries and forests in the context of national food security.**
- **Guarantee the implementation of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) on any climate change mitigation action involving forests such as the REDD+, biofuel plantations and large dams.**
- **Ensure full and effective participation of indigenous peoples including indigenous women and youth in the formulation, implementation, monitoring and reporting of any forest-related mitigation programmes and projects at all levels.**
- **Recognize and promote indigenous peoples’ traditional knowledge, traditional occupations and food systems including the roles and contributions of indigenous women**

The Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP) is a regional alliance consisting of 47 members from 14 countries in Asia with 7 indigenous peoples’ national alliance/network and 35 local and sub-national organizations including 16 are ethnic-based organizations, five (5) indigenous women and four (4) are indigenous youth organizations.

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For more information, download the following documents produced by AIPP in our websites

(www.aippnet.org, www.ccm.in.aippnet.org)

- 1) Research on the Roles and Contribution of Indigenous Women in Sustainable Forest Management in Mekong Countries
- 2) Briefing Paper on REDD+, Rights and Indigenous Peoples: Lessons from REDD+ Initiative in Asia
- 3) Drivers of Deforestation? Facts to be considered regarding the impact of Shifting Cultivation in Asia
- 4) Customary Law in Forest Resources Use and Management: A Case Study among the Dzao and Thai people in Northwest Vietnam
- 5) Briefing Paper on ASEAN, Climate Change, REDD+ and Indigenous Peoples



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- 6) Climate Change, Trees and Livelihood: A Case Study on the Carbon Footprint of a Karen Community in Northern Thailand
- 7) Global Warming Scapegoat: A New Punishment Measure Imposed on Indigenous Peoples for Practicing their Sustainable Traditional Livelihood Activities
- 8) REDD+ Implementation in Asia and the Concerns of Indigenous Peoples
- 9) Briefing Paper on Shifting Cultivation and Climate Change
- 10) Briefing Paper on Indigenous Peoples and Climate Change
- 11) Briefing Paper on Indigenous Women in REDD+: Making their Voice Heard
- 12) Indigenous Knowledge and Customary Law in Natural Resource Management