



Forest Peoples Programme

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Inter-Mountain Peoples' Education and
Culture in Thailand Association



IKAP- Indigenous Knowledge and
Peoples Network Thailand

PRESS INFORMATION - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Sharing power – the end of ‘fortress’ conservation?

Will conservation organisations finally take practical action to implement agreed commitments that recognise the rights of indigenous peoples in protected areas?

Over the last 10 years governments and conservation organisations have made significant commitments to uphold the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities in protected area policies and activities. However, on the ground, the impoverishment of indigenous peoples and the displacement from their ancestral homelands due to protected areas are still the hidden costs of conservation. Despite indigenous peoples gaining increasing recognition as the guardians of forests, wetlands, seas and other ecosystems they depend on, they continue to be left out of many conservation organisations' discussions and projects concerned with preventing biodiversity loss and saving charismatic species and habitats. With the potential for dramatically increased funding for conservation, stemming from payments to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD), and the Convention on Biological Diversity's targeted expansion of protected area coverage to 17% of the earth's land surface and 10% of the marine surface by 2020, it is essential that states and conservation organisations immediately implement procedures and actions to recognize the rights of indigenous peoples across the globe.

The spotlight is now on a high-level dialogue between indigenous peoples' representatives and the IUCN, the world's oldest and largest international environmental network of governments, NGOs and scientists. This dialogue will take place on January 12th 2011 at the *Sharing Power* conference in New Zealand and aims to find concrete ways in which IUCN will effectively implement various resolutions and recommendations in favour of indigenous peoples, adopted at the World Parks Congress 2003 and the World Conservation Congresses 2004 and 2008.

“Many resolutions and recommendations on indigenous peoples' rights have been adopted by IUCN since 1975, but very little of their content has been implemented on the ground. We hope that this meeting will pave the way for the establishment of a practical, action-oriented mechanism that will ensure that past commitments are finally implemented at the local and national level. Setting up such a mechanism would also be a positive contribution to the 2011 United Nations' International Year of

Forests and Decade of Biodiversity 2011-2020.” said Dr. Maurizio Farhan Ferrari, Forest Peoples Programme’s Environmental Governance Coordinator.

In 2003, conservation NGOs at the Worlds Parks Congress consolidated and built on previous resolutions to protect indigenous peoples’ rights and ways of life, culminating in the Durban Accord and Action Plan, which established a ‘new paradigm’ in conservation. Key principles were agreed including that:

- No new parks should be established without the free, prior and informed consent of indigenous peoples;
- Forced resettlement should be strictly eliminated;
- Lands taken without consent should be returned to their traditional owners;
- Indigenous peoples should be involved in the management of protected areas and share in the benefits; and
- Community-based initiatives and processes, such as Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas, should be recognised and supported.

Also, in 2004, at the 7th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, states committed themselves to respect indigenous peoples’ rights and to share power in conservation. However, despite these significant commitments, limited progress has been made in implementing these principles in practice, and much more remains to be done. In many cases, protected areas are still imposed in a top-down fashion in territories, lands and waters traditionally occupied or used by indigenous peoples.

The crucial link between the continued existence of a people, its culture and the ecosystem it is part of constitutes a great opportunity for conservation to achieve objectives of safeguarding biodiversity by enabling indigenous peoples to continue to manage their territories in a sustainable way. This realization is the basis for the ‘new paradigm’. Some positive cases of its implementation are emerging, such as in Campo Ma’an, Cameroon, where Bagyeli indigenous people have regained the respect of their right to gather resources from the national park. Although this is not sufficient to fully redress past wrongs and the Bagyeli are demanding to be allowed to return to live where their houses were before the creation of the park, it is a step in the right direction. Another positive development has been taking place at the local level in Thailand. A pilot project in the Ob Luang National Park, organised by the Thai and Danish governments under the Joint Management of Protected Areas project (JoMPA), involving Karen and Hmong communities, resulted in participatory management of the park. Udom Charoenyomphrai, a Karen representative, recalls:

“Results of the project include the mapping of the area, with the final maps being accepted both by the communities and by the park’s authorities, and the demarcation of community farmland. Although the JoMPA project has expired, the communities and the park continue a successful collaborative management approach. However, collaborative projects like JoMPA are still singular experiences and unfortunately this has not been adopted as a national policy.”

The ‘new paradigm’ also implies the recognition of, and support for, Indigenous Conservation Territories and Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas. Some isolated positive cases have started to emerge, but these are generally scattered experiences and a much better coordinated approach is needed to ensure the implementation of the new paradigm.

The high-level dialogue between indigenous representatives and IUCN leaders at the Sharing Power conference is an opportunity to make a great advancement in respecting the rights of indigenous

people in conservation policy and practice. A summary of the dialogue and details of the commitments of IUCN executives will be available shortly after the meeting.

Ends.

Further Information:

- Forest Peoples Programme and indigenous partners' updates from IUCN CEESP Sharing Power will be available at:
<http://www.forestpeoples.org/special-blogs/iucn-ceesp-sharing-power>
- *Briefing for Media - Securing indigenous peoples' rights in conservation in Suriname, January 10th, 2011 -*
http://www.forestpeoples.org/sites/fpp/files/news/2011/01/Media_Briefing_Suriname_Securing_IP_Rights_in_Conservation_Sharing_Power_Jan_2011_Eng.pdf
- *Briefing for Media - Securing indigenous peoples' rights in conservation: A Review of South West Uganda -*
http://www.forestpeoples.org/sites/fpp/files/news/2011/01/Media_briefing_Uganda_Securing_IP_Rights_in_Conservation_Sharing_Power_Jan_2011_Eng.pdf
- *Briefing for Media - Indigenous peoples and protected areas in Thailand: A Review -*
http://www.forestpeoples.org/sites/fpp/files/news/2011/01/Media%20briefing_Thailand_IPs_and_PAs_Sharing_%20Power_2011_Eng.pdf
- Other documents on this topic can be found at:
<http://www.forestpeoples.org/topics/environmental-governance/international-processes>

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