

To save the forests and stop climate change, save the peoples who protect them

OSLO Norway 15 June 2015

Here in Oslo, we are a mere handful of indigenous leaders of territories that cover major forests in Africa, Asia and Latin America, compared to the 500 individuals who are present here this week. But we represent millions of forest peoples, and the help we come to offer is invaluable. It is a cure, in essence, and the most affordable pathway for climate leaders struggling to come up with solution.

We congratulate Norway to ratify the Paris Agreement in unanimity yesterday 14/06/2016 by the parliament. We also welcome the announcement here in Oslo of a “Joint Statement on Deeper Collaboration on Forests and Climate Change” between the United States and Norway signed by John Kerry US Secretary of State and Vidar Helgesen Minister of Environment and Climate of Norway.

Their goal is to work together to save forests and land use in mitigating the impact of climate change, but will the US follow Norway’s lead in committing a percentage of its climate finance to support titling and recognition of the rights of our peoples to their forests, lands, territories and resources. Research reveals that strengthening our rights must be a central strategy for conserving tropical forests. Without us, the mission is doomed to failure.

Nature has blessed humanity, but it must be respected, and we know how to do this. It is the nature of the peat ecosystems of Indonesia to be wet, for example. To dry them out for the planting of palm oil is to invite disaster. We indigenous people have always known this, but our voices have not been heeded.

The fires that have consumed Indonesia, and continue to threaten that country—and the 16 percent jump in deforestation in Brazil—are examples of what happens when governments fail to include indigenous peoples in their efforts to protect the forests that are so critical to addressing the rapidly changing climate.

With strong rights, Indigenous Peoples can play a powerful role in reducing the emissions that threaten the health of the planet. The rest of the world looks at our forests and sees carbon, but for us those forests mean food, water, and life itself.

Research released at the UN climate change conference in Paris showed that indigenous-managed forests in Africa, Asia and Latin America contain, conservatively, at least 20 percent of the carbon stored in the world’s tropical forests, thus preventing more than three times all the world’s carbon pollution last year from entering the atmosphere. The Woods Hole Laboratory findings released in Paris revealed that the carbon contained in tropical forests in indigenous territories of the Amazon Basin, Mesoamerica, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Indonesia is equivalent to 168.3 gigatonnes of carbon dioxide (GtCO₂)—more than three times the climate-changing gases emitted globally (52.7 GtCO₂) in 2014.

Indigenous communities have a long-standing relationship with their forests that allows them to protect these precious resources—in sharp contrast to other forestry management systems. But our ability to prevent illegal development and protect our territories from high-impact uses is often limited by our lack of legal and financial support, including a lack of title to our lands.

If we are to continue conserving tropical forests—essential for reaching the goals of the global climate agreement, as well as for maintaining ecosystem integrity and our cultural identity—our communities request:

- In recognition of these findings, we call on the United States to join Norway in strengthening our ability to manage and protect our forests, lands territories and resources.
- Titling of our territories, as well as recognition and application of our rights to the resources of those territories and to the environmental services they provide.
- An end to all criminalization, violence and murder of our leaders who speak out in defense of indigenous rights and territories
- Recognition of the contributions of Indigenous Peoples to climate change mitigation and adaptation and inclusion of those contributions for the implementation in governments' Nationally Determined Contributions.
- Implementation of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) for development activities in indigenous territories.
- Dedicated financial mechanism and direct access to climate financing for Indigenous peoples.

SIGNED BY:

- Abdon Nabadon, the Indigenous Peoples' Alliance of the Archipelago (AMAN).
- Candido Mezua, the Mesoamerican Alliance for Peoples and Forests (AMPB).
- Edwin Vasquez, Coordinating Body for the Indigenous Peoples Organizations of the Amazon Basin (COICA)
- Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim, REPALEAC, Congo Basin