

CALL TO ACTION FROM THE CLOSING THE GAP FORUM – AMSTERDAM, 14 FEBRUARY 2018

After travelling from our communities and forest territories in Asia, Africa and Latin America, and following three days of urgent and intensive discussion in Amsterdam, we, the representatives of indigenous, forest and land-based communities from the organisations named below, with the support of Both ENDS and Forest Peoples Programme, issue the following call to action:

Indigenous, forest and land-based peoples around the globe are today suffering unprecedented developmental injustice. Our communities, lands and territories are impacted, degraded and stolen by the encroachment of industrial agribusiness; mining, oil and gas; logging; mega-projects and infrastructure; illicit crops; urban expansion and imposed climate-related projects. Even so-called 'legal' industries are so often linked to corruption, violation of communal land rights and impunity for environmental and human rights impacts, weakening local democratic institutions and creating space for criminal organisations.

Our traditional lands, territories and forests are being cleared against our will and at an increasing rate. According to the European Commission, the consumption of beef, soy and palm oil in the EU alone causes the clearance of 18 football fields of tropical rainforest every minute.¹ As a result, our people endure increasing social injustice and environmental violations, threats to livelihoods, food and water sovereignty, abuses of community and indigenous cultural and territorial rights, displacement, oppression, intimidation, physical abuse and the murder of local people, their leaders and human rights defenders. Everywhere around the world our peoples are under increasing pressure, are being driven from their territories, and abused and murdered by the agents of commercial interests, often in collusion with corrupt government officials.

Increased global consumption is driving rampant deforestation, rights abuses and land and forest grabs, perpetrated by private and state-owned companies and their financiers. These companies, illegal actors, and abusive state agencies are often enabled by governments, unjust trade policies and unaccountable international finance. Despite voluntary commitments, companies and financiers continually fail to respect basic international human rights law and related standards. There is an abundance of government, industry, multilateral and voluntary schemes which purport to offer solutions, but all we see is a growing gap between what is promised and what is happening on the ground. On paper it seems our rights are respected, but in practice they are too often ignored or used as a way for business interests to enter our lands.

The link between disappearing forests and climate change is clear. Global deforestation and forest degradation releases almost as much greenhouse gas emissions as all the cars, trucks and buses in the world combined.² The 2015 Paris Climate Accord recognized our important role as indigenous peoples and local communities, and the role of our traditional knowledge in dealing with - and adapting to - climate change. Respecting our rights, especially our land and territorial rights, is the way to save the world's forest and protect us all from climate change.³

In order to deal with these problems we need to put people first – people are more important than company profits.

Forest peoples are the protectors of the forest; if we had not been protecting nature, the forests would be gone by now. Despite all of the pressure being brought to bear on us, we are creating our own varied solutions, building on our unique cultures and 'cosmovisions' in harmony with nature. We need genuine recognition, protection and respect of our rights, political space, and at times limited support, to be able to realise these creative and collective solutions.

These solutions are based on demarcating and titling our land and territories according to our customary law and traditional systems of land tenure. Other essential actions and proven solutions for sustaining our cultures and forests include self-government, participatory mapping and monitoring our forests, strengthening our own alternative local economic models, developing agro-ecological systems, using legal cases and complaints mechanisms, as well as direct action.

We reject false solutions that are being imposed on us by outsiders, often in the name of climate change, 'development' or the 'national interest', without our free, prior and informed consent.

In light of the worsening situation of indigenous, forest and land-based peoples and accelerating forest loss around

¹See http://ec.europa.eu/environment/forests/impact_deforestation.htm.

² Sims R., et al. 2014: Transport. In: Climate Change 2014: Mitigation of Climate Change. Contribution of Working Group III to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and Smith P. et. al (2014): Agriculture, Forestry and Other Land Use (AFOLU). In: Climate Change 2014: Mitigation of Climate Change. Contribution of Working Group III to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

³ See <https://www.wri.org/sites/default/files/securingrights-full-report-english.pdf>.

the world:

- We demand that all governments, companies, banks and financiers recognise and respect our customary land rights and the right to our own self-determined development, so we can defend, fully control and manage our land, territories and forests, for the benefit of our peoples and all the world.
- Concerned that global consumption is driving negative impacts on our lands, as well as marginalising small-scale producers in both producing and importing countries, we demand that governments, especially governments of high-consuming countries, act now to progressively reduce consumption, with a focus on empowering local production.
- We demand that governments ensure transparency, effective investigation, law enforcement and sanctions for human rights violations, financial and environmental crimes committed by governments, companies and their financiers, all along the supply chain and take robust steps to confront organised crime and illegal trade within these supply chains.
- We demand that governments take urgent measures to resolve land and forest conflicts in full respect of our rights, and put stronger protections in place at the local, national and global levels to guarantee the security and safety of our at-risk human rights and forest defenders.
- We demand that governments acknowledge past violations of our rights, ensure there is land restitution, reconciliation and reparations for the loss of land, water, livelihoods, cultural heritage and sacred forests, with guarantees of non-repetition.