

Contact:

Jamie Kalliongis, +1 314 651 7497 / jkalliongis@rightsandresources.org

Wanda Bautista, +1 302 233 5438 / wbautista@burness.com

DRAFT EMBARGOED UNTIL 07:00 GMT 27 JUNE, 2018 (9 A.M. OSLO)

For embargoed materials please visit CorneredByPas.com; Password: 062718

New research at world's largest forum on tropical forests reveals Indigenous Peoples and local communities protect vital climate resources for a quarter of the money invested by governments, NGOs to conserve protected areas

As climate scientists, political leaders in Oslo reveal spike in deforestation globally, UN official says violence, criminalization block Indigenous Peoples from scaling up proven role as forest guardians

OSLO (June 27 2018)—New findings released today in Oslo suggest Indigenous Peoples and local communities dramatically outperform other managers, conserving lands and forests for a quarter the cost of public and private investments to conserve protected areas.

The new report, "Cornered by Protected Areas," co-authored by Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Victoria Tauli-Corpuz and the Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI) was released as forest researchers here revealed a spike in deforestation that threatens efforts to reach global climate goals.

"If we are to save the world's forests and prevent a climate crisis, Indigenous Peoples and local communities must be part of the solution," Tauli-Corpuz reminded participants from government, civil society, and the scientific community at the world's largest gathering on tropical forests and their role in achieving global climate and development goals. "Based on a growing body of evidence, they make tremendous contributions, conserving some of the most biodiverse lands on Earth."

Separately, but also in Oslo, a new analysis from the University of Maryland on [Global Forest Watch](#) was released today, reporting the loss of a record-high 15.8 million hectares of tropical forest cover in 2017. The findings suggest that efforts of Indigenous Peoples to conserve the world's forests and forest carbon are more urgent than ever before, said Tauli-Corpuz.

"This conservation research underscores the cost of ignoring communities and their immense contributions to conservation," said Alain Frechette, Director of Strategic Analysis and Global

Engagement at RRI. “Investments in forest protection would be more efficient and more just if allocated to the people who have kept the forests standing up until now.”

Indigenous Peoples and local communities have customary rights to at least half of the world’s land, but legal ownership over just 10 percent. **Research** has shown that legally recognized indigenous and community forests store more carbon and experience lower rates of deforestation than forests under other tenure regimes—including protected areas.

Despite protecting their lands—often for generations—Indigenous Peoples and local communities are confronting a growing trend in the designation of their lands across the Global South as “protected areas,” creating a crisis of criminalization and human rights violations, according to the findings presented today by Tauli-Corpuz.

“Instead of partnering with the people who live in and depend on forests, conservation initiatives continue to drive communities from their ancestral lands, part of a larger trend of criminalization worldwide,” said Tauli-Corpuz. “In some cases, they are declared squatters in their own territories. In my capacity as Special Rapporteur, I have seen a disturbing uptick of harassment, criminalization, and even extrajudicial killings targeting communities.”

The new report examined the impacts of protected areas on Indigenous People and local communities in 28 countries, and estimated the conservation investments of communities in 14 countries. It concluded that:

- Indigenous Peoples and local communities have only limited recognition of their community land rights in protected areas;
- In spite of this legal insecurity, indigenous and local communities worldwide invest up to US\$4.57 billion per year in conservation, including up to US\$1.71 billion per year in forest conservation—as much as 23 percent of the amount spent on land and forest conservation by the formal environmental community;
- Communities achieved equal or better conservation results with lower levels of investment—showing that they are not only the most effective, but also the most cost-effective stewards of their lands.

In **Peru**, for instance, legal recognition of community forest rights reduced deforestation and disturbance by as much as 81 percent in the year following titling, and by 56 percent the year after; in other words, securing land rights can lead to immediate environmental benefits.

In **Brazil**, community forests store 36 percent more carbon per hectare than other forests. And given that indigenous and local community lands hold **at least one quarter** of the world’s

aboveground tropical forest carbon—and likely much more—ensuring that communities have secure rights to these lands is critical to larger efforts to protect forests and the carbon they contain.

Governments and environmental organizations have made numerous commitments and pledged to adhere to international standards, yet the communities responsible for maintaining the world's lands and forests face increasing threats.

“Protected areas were already protected by the communities who lived on and conserved these lands for generations,” said Rukka Sombolinggi, Secretary General of the Indigenous Peoples Alliance of the Archipelago (AMAN). “The idea that conservation requires emptying the land of its customary inhabitants has resulted in untold harm to these communities and the lands they protect.”

Added Sombolinggi, “In Indonesia, communities often contend with criminalization and persecution when these forests overlap with private concessions or protected areas. The designation of Kasepuhan community lands as a National Park, for instance, has led to harassment and intimidation by police, who crack down on communities for simply living in their homes and gathering their traditional foods—but fail to put a stop to illegal logging by outsiders.”

The trend of “militarization of conservation”—arming park rangers and organizing them as a military unit—began as a way to help rangers defend themselves against poachers and organized terrorists, but the report notes that violence by armed rangers against unarmed Indigenous Peoples and local communities has been documented in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guatemala, South Africa, and elsewhere. India's Kaziranga National Park alone has seen 106 extrajudicial killings in the last 20 years. Elsewhere, communities face criminalization and violence for practicing their traditional livelihoods.

The findings come as the Special Rapporteur herself faces charges of terrorism in her native Philippines by President Rodrigo Duterte's government, which Tauli-Corpuz believes were filed in retaliation for her advocacy on behalf of displaced Indigenous Peoples in the Mindanao region of the Philippines.

“The science is clear: forests are the best tool we have to combat climate change, and to conserve our forests we need to recognize the rights of the Indigenous Peoples and local communities who invest in protecting them,” said Frechette. “Global conservation schemes such as REDD+ and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets reference the need to consult Indigenous Peoples and local communities. But this is clearly not enough. In order to fully respect the rights of the world's

Indigenous Peoples, we urgently need to move toward rights-based conservation models that can secure human well-being and global progress on climate and development priorities.”

###

The Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI) is a global coalition consisting of 15 Partners, 7 Affiliated Networks, 14 International Fellows, and more than 150 collaborating international, regional, and community organizations dedicated to advancing the forestland and resource rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. RRI leverages the capacity and expertise of coalition members to promote secure local land and resource rights and catalyze progressive policy and market reforms. For more information, please visit www.rightsandresources.org.

Victoria Tauli-Corpuz (The Philippines), the **Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**, is an indigenous leader from the Kankana-ey Igorot people of the Cordillera Region in the Philippines. As an indigenous leader, she has worked for over three decades on building a movement among Indigenous Peoples and as an advocate for women's rights. Ms. Tauli-Corpuz is the former Chair of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (2005-2010). She was actively engaged in drafting and adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007. The Special Rapporteurs are part of what is known as the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council. **Special Procedures**, the largest body of independent experts in the UN Human Rights system, is the general name of the Council's independent fact-finding and monitoring mechanisms that address either specific country situations or thematic issues in all parts of the world. Special Procedures experts work on a voluntary basis; they are not UN staff and do not receive a salary for their work. They are independent from any government or organization and serve in their individual capacity.