



PRESS RELEASE -- for immediate release

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Conserving Protected Indigenous Karen Landscape



MUTRAW DISTRICT, Karen State, Myanmar – The Salween Peace Park, an indigenous Karen landscape conservation initiative dedicated to the conservation of bio-cultural and ecological diversity in one of Southeast Asia's last greatest natural landscapes, has made a major step toward reality. Following a public referendum, a draft charter for the Salween Peace Park, memorializing the inalienable right to self-determination, and local governance of indigenous Karen over their ancestral land, was completed and received wide support.

The Salween Peace Park initiative is a collective effort involving over 300 representatives from 23 village tracts in the 3 townships of Mutraw District; the Mutraw District's Forestry Department; and one of Myanmar's leading environmental organizations, the Karen Environmental and Social Action Network (KESAN). Since May 2016, the proposed 5,205 km² Salween Peace Park has undergone a lengthy and inclusive review process by indigenous Karen communities. The initiative was subject to its first public referendum in May 2016. A second public referendum was held in Day Bu Noh village in the Mutraw (Hpapun) District between December 26th to 28th, 2016. The review and comment period is ongoing and expected to be complete by the end of 2017.

As a signatory to the Myanmar's Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, the KNU has been a key participant in the ongoing political dialogue now led by Myanmar's civilian leader, Aung San Suu Kyi. For more than a half century, the remote and mountainous area comprising the Salween Peace Park has been illegally occupied and tyrannized by the Myanmar Army. Myanmar's military dictatorship has been widely recognized for its brutal campaign of ethnic cleansing against its hundred-plus ethnic minority groups. Its political leadership--marked by violent ethnic intolerance specifically targeted peaceful protesters, journalists, and religious minorities--has been repeatedly decried by the international community as amongst the world's most repressive regimes. To this day, the Myanmar Army maintains more than 300 military camps in Karen state--including 82 camps in Mutraw District.

General Baw Kyaw Heh, second-in-command of the Karen National Liberation Army, explained to KESAN's reporter, "I realized that in Thailand, they have established national parks to protect their wildlife and prevent illegal logging, and I was convinced we should do the same thing in Kawthoolei (Karen State). When KNU signed the bilateral ceasefire agreement in 2012, we decided this might be our chance to begin to implement our dream." The Salween Peace Park initiative has worked to realize the dream of the Karen inhabitants as articulated by General Baw Kyaw Heh, rooted in the recognition of the indigenous and local communities in the district as custodians and guardians of sacred sites. The initiative also adopts a locally-defined sustainable development agenda.

The Salween Peace Park development process continues to work towards international recognition--cooperating with Thailand's adjacent Salween National Park and Salween National Wildlife Sanctuary. Once formally established, the initiative will engage the Myanmar national government in discussions as to how to best protect the reserve and maximize its public benefit

For editors:

The Peace Park's spirit of peaceful self-determination, participatory democracy, environmental integrity and cultural survival is memorialized in the preamble to its recently-concluded draft Charter:

We, the Indigenous Karen people of Mutraw, recognizing our roots that transcend national boundaries; celebrating the natural world, which has sustained our people for generations, honoring the memory of those who have struggled against all forms of injustice against the people and the Earth with a commitment to the present and to the future, in order to create and sustain a lasting peace in our lands, protect and maintain the environmental integrity of the Salween River basin, preserve our unique cultural heritage, and further the self-determination of our people, do enact and establish: the Charter of the Salween Peace Park.

To learn more about the Salween Peace Park, please contact:

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