



For Immediate Release

Film screening of "The Keshorter: Indigenous Karen's Community Forest."

YANGON, MYANMAR (9 AUGUST, 2017). To mark the *International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples*, the Karen Environmental and Social Action Network (KESAN) and the Kawthoolei Forestry Department (KFD) of the Karen National Union (KNU) are releasing a new documentary film about the Keshorter Forest, an exceptional example of Indigenous forest conservation in Karen State, Burma.

The Keshorter Forest is a pristine ecological, social and spiritual sanctuary for Indigenous Karen communities that has existed for many generations. The forest is located in western Mutraw (Papun) District and eastern Klerlweehtoo (Nyaunglaybin) District of Kawthoolei in Burma. The Keshorter forest is under the collective governance, protection, and management of 15 villages and covers a total area of 14,606 acres. Much of this is primary mountainous forest and is home to numerous rare and endangered species, including tigers and Hoolock Gibbons. This area also holds immense mythical and historical significance for the local Karen Indigenous people.

The 26 - minute documentary explores Indigenous Karen people's knowledge, wisdom, and practices of sustainable conservation of their forest and natural resources that they have depended on for their cultural identity, health, livelihoods, and overall well-being for generations.

Over 200 species of medicinal plants exist in the Keshorter Forest. "If our forest is destroyed, we will not have herbal medicinal plants anymore...the community's health will be negatively impacted," said Naw Paw Lay Lay, a local teacher and herbalist.

The benefits of Keshorter Forest extend far beyond Kawthoolei. As community elder Saw Oh Moo says, "our actions for forest and wildlife conservation and protection also have positive impacts on the world, which is affected by the circumstances of climate change and global warming."

Since the peace process and political reforms undertaken in Myanmar, massive economic developments have begun in the forested, resource-rich territories of Indigenous Karen peoples without their free, prior and informed consent (FPIC). Despite the challenges, local indigenous communities are collectively responding to the threats by establishing community forests. A community forest is jointly managed by the local community and the KNU's Forestry Department. "Cooperation and collaboration with the local community is crucial; to strengthen local community participation and collaboration in forestry activities for the long-term is important," said P'doh Mahn Ba Tun, head of KFD.

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Notes to Editor:

Karen Environmental and Social Action Network (KESAN) is an indigenous Karen organization that empowers indigenous Karen communities, promotes locally - owned genuine peace, and protects environment, lands and livelihoods.

Kawthoolei Forestry Department (KFD) is the KNU's department that spearheads forest and forest-related resource governance through effective forestry management, implementation and enforcement of ecologically and socially sound policy that recognizes customary forest tenure rights of indigenous Karen peoples in the KNU's administered areas.