



## Statement on the Declaration of the Salween Peace Park's Establishment

Date: 18 December 2018

On this day, December 18th, we indigenous Karen communities of Mutraw District officially declare the establishment of the Salween Peace Park. This declaration is to fulfill our collective vision for a grassroots pathway to peace and self-determination, and our responsibility to transfer our ancestral domain to our children with abundant forest and clean water. We have developed the SPP through numerous consultations with and between communities and KNU authorities at the village tract, township and district levels. We, the Karen communities of Mutraw District voiced our support for the establishment of the SPP in a charter referendum, with 75.1% of the voting-age population endorsing the SPP Charter during the signature campaign in 2018. Interest in our Peace Park vision was demonstrated by the attendance of almost 1000 people at launch, comprising representatives from our communities in Mutraw District, the KNU, Karen CBOs, ethnic representatives from across Burma/ Myanmar and journalists- both domestic and from abroad.

Rooted in Karen customary management systems, social and environmental justice, and deliberative democracy; the SPP will present what good governance of natural resources looks like at the local level. It will show that in these verdant rolling hills no land is vacant, and every patch of soil, every plant, animal, and human coexist peacefully in a holistically managed ecosystem. The SPP initiative is guided by our three core aspirations: *peace and self-determination, environmental integrity, and cultural survival*. Ultimately, this initiative aims to create peace and to protect this stronghold of Karen culture and biodiversity from threats, both old and new. Our traditions are intimately tied to the land, and there are no better protectors of the forests, rivers and natural resources here than our communities.

The Salween Peace Park represents our bottom-up response to the typically top-down approach to resolving some of the most pressing issues of our time. This grassroots approach to pursuing peace, environmental sustainability and community development is reflected in the governing structure we outline in the SPP Charter. The governing bodies of the SPP—the SPP Governing Committee and SPP General Assembly—are structured so that the majority of seats are allotted to representatives from our Indigenous Karen communities. Although our community representatives are the majority, cross-collaboration in SPP governance is enshrined as the SPP governing bodies also reserve seats for representatives of the KNU and Civil Society Organizations. Establishment of the Salween Peace Park is only the first step of many. To continue the momentum of our initiative, we will elect representatives for the governing bodies and hold our first SPP General Assembly in the coming year.

Enacting our vision in the SPP creates another path for our communities to pursue peace and self-determination. We will demonstrate what a more peaceful and sustainable life can be by developing our own participatory governance structure to protect the environment and manage our lands and natural resources. By establishing the SPP which recognizes and upholds our communities' customary land management systems while simultaneously uniting communities, the KNU and CSOs within the SPP governing body, we can demonstrate that a peaceful and people-centered federalism is possible here and now.

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

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