



## Statement on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Session of the Salween Peace Park General Assembly – December 2020

From 16-18<sup>th</sup> December 2020, we, Indigenous Karen communities of the Salween Peace Park (SPP) convened the 2<sup>nd</sup> Session of the Salween Peace Park General Assembly to mark the success of our concerted will in the creation of a peaceful home where nature and life can co-exist in harmony, and to collectively lay out future plans to further this Indigenous Karen people conserved territory.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Session of the SPP's General Assembly was convened in Mutraw District, Karen State, Kawthoolei, Burma. Over 200 representatives of SPP's General Assembly, Mutraw District's leaders of the Karen National Union, Indigenous community elders, and community-based organizations joined this significant event which was organized and convened safely in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak.

This 2<sup>nd</sup> Session of the General Assembly marks two years since the establishment of the SPP. In this short time the Peace Park has received international awards such as the 2020 Equator Prize, established by the United Nations to promote sustainable development, and the 2020 Goldman Environmental Prize, awarded to Paul Sein Twa, the co-founder and Chairperson of the Salween Peace Park.

During the Session, General Assembly members discussed decisions made in the previous Session of the General Assembly. They also reviewed the newly drafted wildlife hunting law, due to be presented for ratification in 2021.

Requests by more village tracts in Mutraw District to join the Peace Park were approved, demonstrating how local communities can see the benefits of the park. A convention for the advisory group of elders was proposed, alongside an SPP-wide exchange of traditional knowledge holders to learn from and celebrate the diversity of indigenous practices within the SPP. This will feed into ongoing work to strengthen traditional hunting and wildlife and biodiversity conservation practices across the SPP and to develop a cultural education curriculum. It was also agreed to build a cultural exhibition hall to record this knowledge and make it accessible to all.

Representatives agreed to continue to expand the campaign calling on the Burma Army to withdraw from the SPP, so that displaced communities can rebuild their homes and once again govern their ancestral territories. A series of community engagement sessions will also be held across the SPP connecting directly with communities across the area to explore traditional Karen practices, indigenous peoples' rights and contributions to conservation across the world, and the work of the Assembly's various working groups.

The success of the park is thanks to the determination of all the people of the Salween Peace Park to create a safe and sustainable environment, protecting people and the environment. This is despite conflict and human rights violations, restrictions and fear caused by the presence of the Burma Army and despite the central civilian government's development plans which ignore the wishes of local communities.

The awards and achievements demonstrate that our Salween Peace Park is being recognized by the international community as a movement that offers a solution to environmental crisis and conflict in a peaceful manner, through the recognition of the rights and role of indigenous people and their customary laws in conservation.

It is time for the Burma Government to learn and change their policies and laws that exclude the indigenous people in conservation and development. They must recognize the rights and customary law of indigenous people

in conservation and development, not just in Kawthoolei, but across the country in all ethnic states. They must recognize the rights of self-determination of the people in decision making about forest, land and water resources management. In a country where there is such diverse ethnicity with different customs and traditional laws this is the only long term sustainable and just solution to end conflict and create peace.

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