



Statement of the Salween Peace Park Governing Committee on the International Day of The World’s Indigenous Peoples

“Fight for Our Future”

For immediate release on August 9, 2024

Today, on International Day of The World’s Indigenous Peoples (IDWIP), Salween Peace Park’s Governing Committee, KNU Mutraw District’s leadership, customary leaders, Karen Community-Based Organizations, and local Indigenous communities of the Salween Peace Park (SPP), come together across Mutraw District, Kawthoolei to celebrate this significant day in showing their unique biocultural knowledge, traditional way of life, culture, and biodiversity that sustain their ancestral territories, and to stand in solidarity with Indigenous communities all over the world in our shared and distinct struggles against repression, imperialism, and ecological exploitation. Today, we join our voices in unison to assert our unconditional rights to self-determination and territorial governance.

The theme of this year's International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples is “Protecting the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Voluntary Isolation and Initial Contact.” The Salween Peace Park stands in solidarity with Indigenous groups in voluntary isolation facing existential threats. We recognize that where collective rights to lands and territories are protected, forests and societies thrive together. Indigenous Peoples, exercising their right to self-determination, have the right to autonomy or self-government, as enshrined in Article 4 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

Thanks to the unwavering efforts of the Indigenous Karen of the SPP, 295 Kaw Customary Lands, 6 Wildlife Sanctuaries, 9 Reserved Forests, and 43 Community Forests have been documented and are under the effective protection and stewardship of over 100,000 Indigenous Karen people. This has been enabled by the SPP’s inclusive, bottom-up approach to environmental governance which is based upon, and continually informed by Karen traditional self-governance systems. The custodianship and autonomy of the Indigenous Karen people in the SPP play an instrumental role in addressing global ecological crises, particularly biodiversity loss and climate change.

Indigenous Karen communities have faced decades of military oppression and ethnic chauvinism, displacement, land grabbing, and threats from extractivist development projects. Since the military coup in 2021, the State Administration Council (SAC) has conducted ongoing attacks intentionally targeting civilians, including indiscriminate aerial attacks in the SPP. Despite these challenges, people across Burma are striving for peace, the end of dictatorship, and the creation of a genuine

federal democracy from below. We assert our right to live peacefully and govern our own territories.

We will continue to move towards actualizing the SPP's goals of peace and self-determination, ecological integrity, and cultural survival. In the SPP, our reciprocal coexistence with our lands and forests enables us to endure and persist. We will continue to safeguard and preserve our ancestral territory, culture, and biodiverse natural resources for future generations of Indigenous Karen peoples and for the well-being and sustainability of our shared planetary ecosystem.

On IDWIP, the Governing Committee of the SPP firmly state our demands as below;

- (1) **Immediate Cessation of Discrimination and Violence:** End all social, cultural, and political discrimination, injustice, and systematic violence against Indigenous Peoples in Kawthoolei, Burma, and worldwide.
- (2) **End Military Dictatorship and Aggression:** Cease military dictatorship and ethnic chauvinism in Burma. End the State Administration Council (SAC) military aggression and completely withdraw its troops from our ancestral territories.
- (3) **Recognize Self-Determination Rights:** Fully recognize and realize the collective self-determination rights of Indigenous Peoples over their ancestral lands and natural resources at local, national, and global levels.
- (4) **Support Indigenous Environmental Governance:** Unconditionally recognize and support Indigenous Peoples' environmental management and governance. Respect their unique biocultural knowledge, practices, and approaches in addressing global environmental crises.

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