



The Traditional Owners of The Gully Aboriginal Place in Katoomba (the Blue Mountains), the Darug and Gundungurra Nations, the [Girringun Aboriginal Corporation](#), the [Kimberley Land Council](#), the [New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service](#), the Blue Mountains City Council, the [ICCA Consortium](#), the [World Network of Indigenous and Local Community Land and Sea Managers](#), [UNDP GEF SGP](#), the PAPR programme of [Vancouver Island University](#), [Macquarie University](#) and [CSIRO](#) are pleased to announce:

## **Communities conserving nature and culture**

***A gathering among Aboriginal Peoples, Indigenous Peoples and local communities from five continents***

**9-11 November 2014**

**Welcome to Katoomba -- the heart of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area, shared Country of the Dharawal, Gundungurra, Wiradjuri, Wanaruah, Darkinjung and Darug Nations (New South Wales, Australia)**



## Announcement and call for participation

A close association is often found between a specific Indigenous People or local community and a specific territory or area— including coastal and marine areas. Much richer than can be expressed in words, the relationship is a bond of livelihood, energy and health. It is a source of identity and culture, autonomy and freedom. It is the connecting tie among generations, preserving memories from the past, and connecting those to the desired future. It is the ground on which communities learn, identify values and develop self-rules. For many it is also a connection between visible and invisible realities, material and spiritual wealth. With territory and nature, with “our land and sea Country”, go life, dignity and self-determination as peoples.



Remarkably, these close associations are found in all of the planet’s five continents. From the sand beaches of the Pacific to the shores of the Arctic Ocean, from the cloud forests of central Africa to the highlands of America’s South Cone, from the spectacular dry lands of Australia, to the wetlands of tropical Asia, thousands of names are used by peoples and communities to express that bond in thousands of different languages... and thousands of diverse approaches are developed to keep that bond

alive in the face of mounting threats and opposing conditions.

In Australia, Aboriginal Peoples have been *caring for Country* for as long as they have been living on the land. Today, many of them take advantage of a government programme to recognize and support Indigenous Protected Areas... Throughout the Amazon, indigenous territories provide the best examples of forest conservation and sustainable livelihoods under collective land title... In the Philippines, indigenous peoples assert collective rights to their Ancestral Domains and the capacity to conserve them as a further argument to strengthen such rights... The Tla-o-qui-aht First Nations of British Columbia (Canada) work with an effective model called Tribal Parks... In Senegal, local fishermen govern mangroves and estuarine fisheries as a Community Conserved Heritage by taking advantage of the national Law of Decentralization... In Spain, old and new communities organize themselves around their ‘commons’, which they care for and which offer them livelihoods, occasions for solidarity and pride... In Madagascar, traditional communities gather in their *fokonolonas* and claim territorial governance responsibility on the basis of the country’s Constitution... In the highlands of Patagonia, the Mapuche people affirm their Life Plans and ask them to be incorporated in the





management plans of state protected areas... In Iran, indigenous nomadic pastoralist tribes reassert their autonomy and culture by collaborating with government officials to have their migration territories recognized as Tribal Conserved Territories (*qoroqs*)... In India fishermen delight to live and work with the wonderful birds inhabiting their conserved wetlands... In the USA, individual landowners recreate communities by bundling together for conservation aims... In the Democratic Republic of the Congo,



Batwa voices stress their will to be the keepers of the forest—respected and supported, and free to express their culture... We could go on and on and on...!

On a planet in a difficult equilibrium between unparalleled wealth and consumption and disastrous environmental change, a diversity of voices from five continents seem to merge as in a chorus. They celebrate nature, they want the respect of local collective rights and responsibilities, they assert cultural diversity and spiritual values, and they want to

be able to gain their livelihoods in sustainable ways, inseparable from the conservation of the integrity and diversity of nature. These voices belong to indigenous peoples and communities from all over the world and speak of their **bonds with their unique territories, landscapes and seascapes**.

Indigenous peoples and local communities ask, first of all, for **recognition**— recognition of their existence, the values and benefits they bring to their societies and the planet, the collective rights and responsibilities they are ready to assume. And they ask for **self-determination** and **freedom from fear**— fear that a freeway or an open cast mine is suddenly built on their backyard without their consent. Fear that their children drink water from polluted aquifers. Fear that tomorrow there will be forests without trees, seas without fish, skies without birds. They ask for **respect** for the value and beauty of their unique cultures, each evolved through generations of patient work, collaboration and ingenuity. And they ask for **appropriate and mutually supportive interactions** with society at large.



These voices and communities have much to share about the ways in which they are keeping their bonds with nature alive, the ways in which they struggle to get recognized and respected by governments , other communities, corporations and entrepreneurs... but these dialogues and exchanges do not usually happen as these communities are dispersed throughout the world. Now, a rare occasion has arisen to get a good number of them together, in Sydney, Australia, where they will participate in the sixth World Parks Congress (WPC) on 12-19 November 2014. In fact, they will all contribute their experiences to the Congress and inform and inspire thousands of colleagues, but in the excitement and engagement of the Congress they will hardly have a chance to meet... let alone exchange peacefully and learn from one another.

Born from the realization of this unique opportunity, this initiative calls for indigenous peoples and local communities to dedicate three days, prior to the actual World Parks Congress, to a community dialogue in which they will meet, exchange experiences and ideas and strengthen each other's understanding and determination. The initiative is supported by the Traditional Owners of the Gully Aboriginal Place, where the overall event will culminate, which is at the heart of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area— Country shared by the Dharawal, Gundungurra, Wiradjuri, Wanaruah, Darkinjung and Darug Nations. Other Australian Traditional Owners who participate in organising the gathering include the [Girringun Aboriginal Corporation](#) and the [Kimberley Land Council](#). International participants are convened by the [ICCA Consortium](#), an international association supporting the recognition of territories and areas conserved by indigenous peoples and local communities, and by the [World Network of Indigenous and Local Community Land and Sea Managers](#) (WIN)— an international network founded in Australia in response to Aboriginal rangers' wish to share their valuable knowledge and experience in environmental management among each other and with others around the world. Further major sponsors include the [New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service](#), the Blue Mountains City Council, the PAPR programme of [Vancouver Island University](#), [UNDP GEF SGP](#), [Macquarie University](#) and [CSIRO](#).



This is a call for representatives of indigenous peoples and local communities who have a **strong bond with nature** and wish to keep it alive to express their willingness to get together from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> of November in Katoomba, in the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area and attend a special gathering in The Gully Aboriginal Place, on the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>. On the occasion, while exchanging experiences from five continents, there will be time to discuss why communities struggle so hard to conserve nature and culture, how they manage to persist against such strong odds, and what strategic approaches and institutional arrangements are most helpful in different circumstance—and in particular **with or without collective legal rights and tenure to land and natural resources**. The Indigenous Protected Areas model of Australia, other models from Australia and models from four other continents will be considered and compared. Approaches for both shared governance and more autonomous community governance will be illustrated via examples and analyzed. A celebration of diversity and mutual learning and support will be nourished throughout.







The gathering will provide to Aboriginal Peoples, Indigenous Peoples and local communities from around the world an occasion to share experiences in their struggles to defend their territories and manage natural resources in full recognition of their collective capacities, rights and responsibilities. A summary document will be produced to capture and share the learning that will take place. And the gathering will remain alive through the social media networking opportunities fostered— among others— by the ICCA Consortium and WIN.

The overall activities will begin on the 9<sup>th</sup> of November with the General Assembly of the ICCA Consortium, a parallel meeting of WIN, a meeting of the IUCN WCPA Young Professionals and the get-together of a number of other organizations. The event will culminate with more participants joining the “Gathering in The Gully”, on November 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>.

### Objectives of the gathering

- Review examples from five continents of ***territories and areas conserved<sup>1</sup> in accordance with Aboriginal, Indigenous and local knowledge, institutions and customary law***, under diverse legal systems.
- Discuss and compare various forms of legal and social recognition of the collective rights and responsibilities and the “capacity to conserve” of Aboriginal Peoples, Indigenous Peoples and local communities as examples of ***governance options for conservation*** in a spectrum from sole and direct governance under collective tenure to shared governance arrangements with government agencies and other parties.
- Compare the experience of peoples and communities from different regions of the world, including national coalitions and federations that embrace ***specific strategies*** to defend and conserve their territories, support sustainable livelihoods and secure their collective rights.
- Identify ***recommendations for the World Parks Congress*** to support models and approaches by which Aboriginal Peoples, Indigenous Peoples and local communities can conserve the integrity and diversity of nature, re-affirm their unique cultures and live well with themselves and with others.
- On the basis of the results of the gathering, reaffirm and strengthen, for all those interested, ways to remain in touch and keep providing ***mutual support in the years and decades ahead***.



<sup>1</sup> Conservation is here understood as: “...the management of human use of the biosphere so that it may yield the greatest sustainable benefit to present generations while maintaining its potential to meet the needs and aspirations of future generations. Thus conservation is positive, embracing preservation, maintenance, sustainable utilization, restoration, and enhancement of the natural environment”. (*World Conservation Strategy*. Gland, IUCN/WWF/UNEP, 1980).