

Hon. Jose C. Alvarez
Governor of Palawan
Puerto Princesa City
Palawan, The Philippines

Geneva (Switzerland), 3 August 2013

Ref: Letter of concern regarding oil palm plantations indiscriminate expansion into biodiversity-rich environments and areas essential for the livelihoods of indigenous peoples

Honourable Governor,

The ICCA Consortium is an international association under Swiss law uniting federations and organizations of indigenous peoples, local communities and NGOs concerned with the appropriate recognition of the territories and areas conserved by indigenous peoples and local communities (ICCAs) throughout the world. We are a partner organization of the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP/GEF/SGP) and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

The ICCA Consortium's worldwide engagement is part of the global recognition of the importance of indigenous peoples' and local community conservation practices to achieve global conservation goals and targets. This recognition is enshrined in the Convention on Biological Diversity, which requires Parties, such as The Philippines, to "recognize the role of indigenous and local community conserved areas in biodiversity conservation and diversification of governance types" (COP 10/ X 31), a role fundamental to reach Aichi Biodiversity Targets 11 and 18, among others. Various other international agreements— including the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples— lend support to the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities to manage and conserve their territories according to their own values, institutions, and practices. Such agreements also recognise indigenous peoples' and community conservation as compatible with, and actually promoting, local sustainable livelihoods and poverty eradication efforts. Drawing lessons from numerous successful examples and the experience of problems round the world, the ICCA Consortium works to support understanding and appropriate practice in the integration of conservation, sustainable livelihoods and the respect of human and indigenous peoples' rights.

On behalf of the ICCA Consortium, we write this letter to communicate our deep concern regarding alarming reports and information from our Philippines' Consortium Members and others about the ***encroachment of oil palm plantations on secondary and primary forest***, as most clearly evidenced in the Municipality of Quezon, Rizal, and Bataraza. This adds to reports that the ***impact of oil palm development on biodiversity in general*** has been dramatic, causing an unprecedented drop in local population of fauna including avifauna. We understand that, in accordance with the Philippine Oil Palm Development Plan, only 'idle' and 'underdeveloped' land could be converted into oil palm plantations. We hear, however, that ***oil palm expansion in Palawan is taking over community-conserved areas that include community hunting grounds and reservoirs of non-timber forest products*** (NTFPs). NTFPs, which are customarily used in careful, sustainable ways, are essential for local livelihoods and economies.

We also hear that ***oil palm expansion in Palawan is taking over farmland regularly used by local indigenous peoples to grow upland rice, root crops, and fruit trees***. This is affecting the diversity of traditional cultivars and making local communities ever more dependent on purchased food. We understand that ***oil palm plantations have ushered the spread of various pests into their neighbouring coconut groves***, causing the death of thousands of coconuts and a drop in *copra* production. We also understand that ***oil palm expansion is polluting the water sources of local communities***. Also that— through ambiguous and legally dubious practices— ***oil palm companies***

acquire land at the disadvantage of indigenous peoples (some reports mention indigenous lands rented to oil palm enterprises for as low as PHP500/ha/year). On the ground of all this, we are not surprised to hear that **oil palm expansion is causing havoc in the lives of many indigenous peoples, impoverishing them to an unprecedented level.**

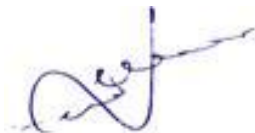
We are aware that an inter-agency meeting on oil palm development will take place in Puerto Princesa on 7 August 2013. Some of our Member organizations will attend and will kindly hand you a copy of this letter.

On that occasion, **we respectfully urge you to hear the voices of impacted communities and impede any further destructive expansion of oil palm in Palawan**— a UNESCO-declared Man & Biosphere Reserve and a land where territories and areas conserved by indigenous peoples and local communities abound. We respectfully also urge you to make sure that **oil palms planted in illegally-cleared forest areas are removed** immediately, that those **areas are restored with endemic species** and that the relevant costs are sustained by the responsible companies. **Palawan should be free of biodiversity-destructive monoculture plantations!** Palawan could and should instead be **a world example of the traditional mosaics of multiple-use areas by which indigenous peoples conserve biodiversity and secure sustainable livelihoods.**

We trust that you are aware that scientific institutions and civil society— in Europe as in other world regions— are increasingly knowledgeable and vocal about the environmental disasters caused by oil palm monocultures. Specific campaigns are happening with a focus on many areas, but Palawan is one of the most glaring cases where responsible governance should put a stop to a practice that impoverishes today's communities and leaves behind a polluted and biodiversity-starved environment for the communities of tomorrow. The ongoing international campaign to stop oil palm expansion in Palawan, with its 100,000 signatures, is just an indicator of how strongly people all over the world wish Palawan to retain its biodiversity and the cultural practices that go with that.

Honourable Governor, as you know, biodiversity is globally in decline, churned away by the same persuasive forces that no doubt are producing "excellent justifications" to keep expanding palm oil monocultures in Palawan. This is not a reversible decision, however, and, **while biodiversity and cultural diversity will only become more and more precious in the immediate future and keep generating vibrant livelihoods... stale oil palm monocultures will only provide you with a dreary landscape, devoid of nature and culture.** You have the mandate and authority to ensure the future of Palawan's biological and cultural diversity. We earnestly hope that you will use that authority to protect and restore your land for your people. In the short term, you may see for yourself how appreciated this will be when you will report about it at top world forums such as the Convention on Biological Diversity and the World Parks Congress. In the longer term, this will constitute a marvellous legacy for yourself, and the pride and future of the indigenous communities of your wonderful island.

With our most sincere wishes,



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President, ICCA Consortium



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