

9th December 2014

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Ref: Urging firm moratorium on clear cutting plans for the community-conserved old-growth boreal forest of Ostola (Kontiolahti, North Karelia, Finland) and negotiations to formally recognise Ostola as a Community Conserved Area

Dear Sirs,

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). Our Members and Honorary members span over fifty countries.

The ICCA Consortium's worldwide engagement is part of the global recognition of the importance of community conservation practices, including by those who define themselves as discrete indigenous peoples and those who do not, to achieve global conservation goals and targets. This recognition is enshrined in the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), which recommends Parties to "*recognize the role of indigenous and local community conserved areas in biodiversity conservation and diversification of governance types*" (CBD COP 10, Decision X 31), a role considered fundamental to reach Aichi Biodiversity Targets 11 and 18, among others.¹

We are writing to express concerns regarding the threatened clear cutting plans for the last boreal forests on the lot "Ostola" of Kontiolahti (North Karelia) by the Finnish state enterprise Metsähallitus. In this, we join in solidarity with an international campaign that unites scientists, indigenous peoples, local communities and their organisations led by the [Snowchange Cooperative](#) of Finland.

We were extremely surprised to hear that Metsähallitus State Enterprise might be in breach of its [PEFC Certificate](#) with regard to recent decades of its operations in Karelia. Despite the requirement of the certificate, we are told that the company is logging old growth and natural forests and is doing so even in the face of local opposition. This allegedly took place in the 1990s in the area of Raesärkkä, Nurmee (North Karelia), while in November 2014 clear-cuts-- we are told -- proceeded in the culturally relevant [Viena Karelia area](#). These actions are in direct violation of its PEFC Certification, which explicitly states that timber cutting:

- *is tailored to the specific needs of family- and community-owned forests, with lasting contributions to livelihoods and rural development*
- *sets the highest standards for forest certification aligned with the majority of the world's governments, including.... recognizing the principle of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC)*

In Kontiolahti, North Karelia, we are informed that Metsähallitus has placed old-growth forest areas under "economic forestry". This includes Ostola, a forest internationally known for its community relevance and

biodiversity, being home to large boreal mammals such as the European brown bear, Wolverine, Lynx, visiting Boreal wolf and EU Directive–relevant bird species, including several Owl species, the Greenish warbler, Capercaillie and Forest grouse. While Metsähallitus has released a [statement](#) stating the contrary, the local community believes that the forest is under threat. We are told that direct opposition to the forestry plans was necessary to force the company not to carry out logging in the last old growth parts of the forest and issue a formal statement on such intentions. We are told that Ostola is the last of the unprotected boreal forests in the area, and that its lots can still be sold and/or cut immediately if and when local and international attention on the situation eases.

The community that is currently using non-timber forest products and striving to conserve Ostola forest is working towards having it listed in the ICCA Registry of UNEP WCMC in Cambridge (UK). During the World Parks Congress, held recently in Australia, the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Global Manager of UNDP GEF SGP listened with surprise and concern to the tale of the threats faced by the Ostola forest and possible clear-cuts by Metsähallitus. The ICCA Consortium encouraged Snowchange cooperative to make better known their engagement to conserve their community forest and to seek formal recognition from the Finnish government to this effect.

Given that so little of the boreal old growth and community-relevant forests remain in Finland, we would kindly urge you to agree to:

1. *Stop all plans of economic forestry and clear cuts in the Ostola lot and install a full moratorium on this lot indefinitely.*
2. *Start direct negotiations with the representatives of the Snowchange Cooperative to conserve this last piece of forest, while allowing community-relevant uses, such as hunting, berry picking, cultural and traditional uses of the forest.*
3. *Secure the protection of the Ostola forest -- a Finnish-Karelian forest home to epic poems, age-old oral histories, traditions and cultures – as a Community Conserved Area; more specifically agree to a management plan that includes a 6,6 hectare core area of old growth surrounded by a minimum of 50 hectares transition zone, which will allow adequate protection and regeneration support.*

We thank you very much for your kind consideration and we look forward to hearing from you. We would be delighted to celebrate with you a positive and forward looking solution for Ostola old-growth forest, possibly also the first Community Conserved Area to be formally recognized in Finland.

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ⁱ Kothari, A. and A. Neumann, 2014, *ICCAs and Aichi Targets: The Contribution of Indigenous Peoples' and Local Community Conserved Territories and Areas to the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-20*, ICCA Consortium, Kalpavriksh, CBD Alliance, and CENESTA, Teheran (in press).