ICCA Consortium Statement on the CBD COP17 Agenda Item 8(b): Financial Mechanism

Statement by the ICCA Consortium at the 17th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP17) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in Yerevan, Armenia

By the **ICCA Consortium**

Decades of peer-reviewed conservation science and global assessments, including from the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), show us a reality: Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities safeguard over 20% of the Earth's terrestrial area, encompassing an estimated 80% of remaining global biodiversity. We achieve these conservation outcomes through our governance systems, traditional ecological knowledge, and deep biocultural relationships, often at severe personal risk and without public financial compensation.

The ICCA Consortium welcomes the decisions of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Council and the operationalization of the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBFF) in scaling up dedicated initiatives, such as the Heart of Conservation Initiative (HCI), which demonstrate that direct, Indigenous-led financial architecture is both operational and highly effective. We also commend the formal adoption of an aspirational 20% allocation to support actions by Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities across the entire GEF-9 portfolio (GEF Trust Fund, Least Developed Countries Fund [LDCF], Special Climate Change Fund [SCCF], and GBFF).

However, programmatic targets alone do not equal structural equity or financial justice. As Parties begin defining the architecture for the 10th replenishment of the GEF (GEF-10), a fundamental institutional deficit remains: there is no clear, formal, or direct pathway for Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities to communicate and embed their self-determined priorities into GEF replenishment negotiations. Currently, our participation is going exclusively through the Indigenous Peoples Advisory Group (IPAG). While IPAG

provides valuable technical advice, an advisory body within an executive secretariat is not a substitute for direct rights-holder representation. Routing structural political priorities through advisory channels dilutes sovereign voices and maintains an asymmetric governance model where decisions regarding our lands are made without our seat at the table.

Furthermore, we note with grave concern that while the concept of “Direct Access” for Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities has entered official draft negotiation texts (e.g., CBD/SBI/7/L.11), it remains heavily bracketed and undermined by geopolitical caveats. Conditioning direct access through state-centric intermediaries or bureaucratic approval loops violates the spirit of Target 22 and Target 19 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KM-GBF). For us, direct access means direct accreditation and transfer of funds to Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLC)-led financial mechanisms and territorial institutions without state-level interception. Harmonized, simplified administrative requirements must respect customary governance structures rather than forcing a single administrative paradigm onto traditional institutions.

We are also deeply concerned by a 27% nominal reduction relative to GEF-8 at a moment when the global biodiversity crisis demands an increase in international public finance under Article 20. While we welcome the allocation of 35% of GEF-9 to the Biodiversity Focal Area and the 70% Rio marker integration target, scaling down total capitalization while expanding commitments under the KM-GBF places an unfair burden on developing nations and frontline custodians. Private capital mobilization and blended finance instruments should never replace state obligations under Article 20, nor should they commodify customary territories without free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC).

Therefore, we are submitting herewith our strategies to be considered:

1. **Establishing a Formal GEF-10 Consultative Track:** To help mandate a direct, institutionalized negotiation pipeline for Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities within the GEF-10 replenishment process beyond advisory bodies like IPAG.
2. **Clean Text on Direct Access:** To lift the brackets and adopt decision language on direct access modalities for IPLCs across all GEF-administered funds, removing geopolitical reservations, footnotes, and restrictive state-level interceptions.
3. **Legal Recognition of Territories of Life:** To ensure that financial allocations under KM-GBF Target 3 prioritize the legal recognition and defense of customary tenure and self-declared ICCAs–territories of life over top-down, fortress models.

If the Convention is to achieve its 2030 targets, it needs to stop treating the true custodians of nature as mere beneficiaries of project activities. We are sovereign rights-holders and must be the core decision-makers for each activity in our territories.