

October 2023

Members of the World Heritage Committee

UNESCO World Heritage Centre, Director, Dr Mechtild Rosler

UNESCO Director General, Ms Audrey Azoulay

Dear Dr Al-Tokhais and Dr Rosler

We are the Karen Indigenous community in the Keeng Krachan National Park and World Heritage Site (WHS). The creation of the National Park, greatly exacerbated by the declaration of the WHS, is affecting us in many ways, specifically:

1. Our land is taken away and our way of life has been changed. We used to practice rotational farming and gather mushrooms, medicinal plants and other things from the forest. But now we are restricted to a small area where we can only farm in the same limited plot year after year.
2. Our family members are also taken away, imprisoned and persecuted because we are accused of being invaders in our own land. As a result our families are broken up and our communal bonds are weakened.

We have been living here for generations, this is our land. Our land and the way we look after it hasn't changed, but suddenly because of the WHS and all the related restrictions, everything that we have been doing and our whole way of life is declared to be wrong.

The government and UNESCO have different views from us about how to protect nature. When they see forests they only see plants and animals – never people. But when we see the forest we see our home, our food, our land and one part of the cycle of planting and growing that helps to protect and strengthen that same forest. You think that when we cut and burn the plants we are destroying the forest, but actually this is part of a process that regenerates and strengthens the forest and the animals.

Therefore we ask the following:

1. We want to keep our way of life, however you label our land – be it WHS, National Park or Conservation forest.
2. We must be part of, and be involved in, any decision about how to manage and take care of our land and its resources. We have the knowledge and the wisdom to protect our land. Hiring some of us as park rangers is not genuine collaboration. We are the experts and should be treated as such.
3. We urge UNESCO to use its influence to stop human rights violations committed by the Thai government against us Indigenous People, including land theft, within the National Park. Many of our people are in prison, have been arrested or are facing criminal charges. We have been criminalised for living on our land in the way that we have always done. We urge you to ask the government to release those in prison, to drop the charges against Karen people and to give us back our land.
4. We want UNESCO to acknowledge and support our way of life and rotational farming. Our practices are sustainable, do not harm the environment and they protect the forest and increase biodiversity. Our way of life and the forest it protects

do not only bring benefits to us, but they benefit the whole world. Rotational farming is our life, but it also supports the life of the whole planet.

- The Thai government does not recognise the existence of Indigenous Peoples in Thailand. As an international institution, committed to respecting human rights, we urge you to officially recognise the existence of Indigenous Peoples in Thailand and within the Kaeng Krachan National Park and WHS. And to acknowledge the role we play in protecting our land.

Sincerely,

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