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**EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE UNTIL
3 OCT 2017 AT 07:30 AM GMT / 09:30 AM CEST / 03:30 AM EDT**

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Indigenous Peoples, Communities Advance Their Rights Over Almost 2 Million Hectares of Forest in Six Countries

Groundbreaking Pilot Projects of New Global Organization Slowed Deforestation In Indonesia, Protected Uncontacted Indigenous Communities in Peru, and Resolved Land-based Conflicts Blocking Mali's Civil War Recovery

STOCKHOLM (3 October 2017)—Up against development projects threatening their forests, Indigenous Peoples and local communities in Indonesia, Mali, Peru, Cameroon, Liberia and Panama are using cutting-edge technology with the help of government agencies to map and secure their rights to 1.78 million hectares of their customary lands and territories. With assistance from a new global organization backed by an international coalition of donors, these communities are strengthening their rights while generating economic and environmental benefits that bolster the world's race to slow the warming climate and combat inequality.

The new organization, [The International Land and Forest Tenure Facility](#), was formally launched today at an event in Stockholm, Sweden. With funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and the Ford Foundation, and committed funds from the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad), the Tenure Facility is the world's first and only funding institution dedicated solely to supporting Indigenous Peoples' and local communities' efforts to secure their rights over their lands and resources. The facility is helping communities and their allies to take advantage of existing laws and policies that are on the books but that, in many cases, have not been implemented by governments due to lack of capacity, resources or will.

"Inequality is the greatest challenge of our time and we can measure its detrimental effects on the economic, social and environmental progress across the globe," said Darren Walker, president of the Ford Foundation. "Strengthening and enforcing the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities to manage their own forests and lands rebalances the equation. By focusing on this issue the global community has the ability to address climate change and entrenched poverty, promote sustainable development, and even achieve a lasting peace in places suffering some of the world's most unrelenting conflicts."

If the facility invests at least US\$10 million a year for its first 10 years, experts project that this investment could increase titled, protected and well-managed community and indigenous tropical forestland by over 40 million hectares, an area roughly the size of Sweden. These efforts would prevent deforestation of at least 1 million hectares, the emission of more than 0.5 gigatons of carbon dioxide and the poverty that befalls communities that lose their lands and livelihoods.

Up to 2.5 billion people live on and manage more than half the world's land area in customary or traditional systems, yet Indigenous Peoples and local communities have formal legal ownership of [just 10 percent of the world's lands](#). Insecure rights lead to abuses and protracted conflicts with governments, companies and migrant settlers. Caught in the middle are many of the world's tropical forests, a key bulwark against climate change but also a resource under siege from global agribusiness, mining and energy investments.

At least [one quarter](#)—or 54.546 GtC—of the carbon stored above ground in the world's tropical forests is found in the collectively managed territories of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. This is 70 percent more than the amount of carbon dioxide emitted globally [in 2015](#). [Research](#) has shown that where Indigenous Peoples' and local communities' rights are secure, rates of deforestation are lower and carbon storage and biodiversity higher.

“Indigenous Peoples and local communities offer a sustainable solution to saving the world's forests.” said Carin Jämtin, director general of Sida. “The Tenure Facility gives these often-unsung forest stewards an opportunity to partner with governments to secure and protect their forests. The new organization provides a powerful solution to save the world's forests from the ground up—keeping a lid on the carbon they contain and sheltering the communities they support.”

Initial results from the Tenure Facility's first round of projects reveal the power of Indigenous Peoples and local communities to secure their own rights and manage and protect the world's precious natural resources, and the power of collaboration with supportive governments to accelerate and scale-up the implementation of progressive laws and policies. The results were released on the eve of the Stockholm conference, co-hosted by the government of Sweden—which recently pledged to go carbon free by 2045. Representatives of 65 countries, governments, companies and organizations are joining, and will take home the urgent message that recognizing the land rights of rural peoples is a low-cost solution toward achieving the world's development, environment and climate agendas.

Leaders from three of the Tenure Facility's six pilot projects—in Indonesia, Mali and Peru—spoke at the event, along with government counterparties/collaborators and the organization's new Executive Director Nonette Royo, about the urgent need to support this new approach.

“Research shows time and time again that Indigenous Peoples are the best stewards of their lands, and have been tirelessly maintaining the resources we all depend on for centuries,” said Ms. Royo, a lawyer, activist and author who most recently led the Samdhana Institute in Southeast Asia. “Leaders from all over the globe see that the crises of deforestation, climate

change, endemic poverty and rights abuses in the rural world have their roots in insecure indigenous and community land rights.”

Indigenous Peoples see a string of “firsts” in Indonesia

In December 2016, Indonesian President Joko Widodo announced that his government would transfer title for 12.7 million hectares of forestland to indigenous communities who have long faced conflict with palm oil, mining and pulp and paper companies responsible for the country’s [deforestation epidemic](#). He made the pledge at a ceremony where nine communities that had mapped their lands and drafted legal regulations—some with support from the Tenure Facility—received title to 13,000 hectares of forest.

President Widodo’s commitment followed a 2013 ruling from Indonesia’s Constitutional Court declaring that the national government had wrongly appropriated an estimated 40 million hectares of customary forestland. To accelerate the recognition of indigenous land rights, the Tenure Facility’s pilot project in the country, led by the Indigenous Peoples Alliance of the Archipelago (AMAN), has drafted regulations in 32 districts and three provinces that, once passed, will lead to tenure security over 1.5 million hectares belonging to 450 indigenous communities. In an innovative new approach, these local regulations include recognition of specific indigenous territories by embedding community maps directly in the legislation.

“In September and October, everyone in Indonesia worries about the forest fires set by palm oil and other companies to clear our forests,” said Rukka Sombolinggi, secretary general for AMAN. “Not a year goes by without at least a few of these fires blowing out of control. But with strong and secure land rights, we can manage and protect our forests instead of watching our livelihoods and homes go up in flames.”

Secure land rights and peace in Mali

The 2015 Peace Accord that ended the civil war in Mali opened a critical window of opportunity to build lasting peace, but failed to address the local land-based conflicts that contributed to the war. These conflicts continued to erupt afterward in many parts of the country where laws and customary rights overlapped, threatening the country’s fragile peace. Impacts from climate change increased this tension; the expanding Sahara Desert was claiming more and more of the contested land. Much of the remaining arable land was privatized for large-scale agriculture enterprises.

The Tenure Facility helped the National Coordinating Body of Peasant Organizations in Mali (CNOP) and HELVETAS Mali to organize and train 17 local land commissions to sort through conflicting claims to determine who owns the land, helping to diminish local conflict by as much as a third and contributing to greater stability throughout the country. The land commissions provide an alternative to the overburdened and inaccessible court system. Pilot leaders are sharing the land commissions’ successes throughout the country, with an eye to extending this work to those communities most directly affected by the national conflict.

“Just as the forests in the south of our country prevent the desert from spreading, resolving disputes over land tenure in a sustainable manner prevents conflict and poverty from becoming more entrenched,” said Boubacar Diarra, pilot project coordinator for HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation. “The local communities have borne the brunt of all that has taken place in Mali. Our work to secure their land rights enables them to develop and helps maintain Mali’s fragile peace.”

Protecting the land rights of uncontacted communities in Peru

More than half of Peru’s territory is forest, and much of that land is indigenous territory. Peer-reviewed research shows that [titling](#) these community lands in the Peruvian Amazon led to an immediate and significant reduction in deforestation. Securing tenure would also set the stage for more sustainable and equitable development. Yet indigenous communities in Peru must navigate [27 separate bureaucratic hurdles](#) before obtaining clear title to their lands, a costly process that can take more than a decade.

In the Madre de Dios region of the Peruvian Amazon—in the southeast part of the country—the Tenure Facility supported the Native Federation of the River Madre de Dios and Tributaries (FENAMAD) in partnership with the Peruvian Society for Environmental Law (SPDA) and the Regional Government of Madre de Dios (GOREMAD) to secure the land title of five indigenous communities covering 60,000 hectares and home to 890 indigenous people.

FENAMAD also worked with the Ministry of Culture to strengthen systems for monitoring and defending the land and forest tenure rights of Indigenous Peoples in voluntary isolation, protecting those in the Madre de Dios Territorial Reserve, which covers more than 800,000 hectares and is under intensive pressure from illegal logging, mining and petroleum exploration.

“In Madre de Dios, we have seen so much of our forests cleared and we have lost much,” said Julio Cusurichi, president of FENAMAD. “Today, however, we move forward in protecting our culture and livelihoods, along with the lands that sustain us. Our roots are in these forests, and we care for them like any other people tend to their own homes.”

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About the Tenure Facility

The Tenure Facility is the first and only international, multi-stakeholder institution exclusively focused on securing land and forest rights for Indigenous Peoples and local communities. It provides grants to implement tenure reform within existing government and international structures and shares the knowledge, innovations and tools that emerge. Created in 2014 by the Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI), the Tenure Facility is dedicated to scaling up recognition of collective land and forest rights globally. This helps reduce conflict and further the achievement of global human rights, environment and development goals. The Tenure Facility is an international foundation registered in Sweden. For more information, visit www.thetenurefacility.org.