

MEDIA ALERT “CAMPAIGN TO SAVE CAMBODIA’S AMAZON”

April 9, 2012

EarthAction, a global network of over 2,000 organizations in 160 countries, and Cultural Survival, an advocacy organization for Indigenous Peoples’ rights, have begun a worldwide campaign to protect the Prey Lang forest in Cambodia—its people, its trees, its life. The international campaign supports and complements the local efforts of the Prey Lang Community Network, a group of mostly Indigenous people whose villages surround the Prey Lang forest and whose livelihoods depend on the forest’s resources. Prey Lang, about the size of Rhode Island, is the last large primary forest of its kind on the Indochina peninsula.

Campaigners point out that Prey Lang is to Cambodia, what the Amazon is to Brazil. A few decades ago, almost no one recognized the imminent destruction of the Amazon rainforest and its potential damage to global ecosystems. “That’s where we are today with the imminent destruction of Prey Lang,” states Lois Barber, EarthAction’s Executive Director.

This global campaign has won a legion of new supporters as the destruction of the forest accelerated and threats to Indigenous people escalated. A recent unconfirmed report from insiders that Cambodia’s government has granted four additional land concessions in the core of the Prey Lang area has galvanized the campaign. “If true, and these concessions are allowed to go ahead,” says Barber, “we fear it is ‘game over’ for the forest and its communities.” She adds, “At this point, the only way to stop the granting of concessions and the illegal logging is to exert international pressure on the Cambodian government.”

Despite government intimidation, threats of violence, and the presence of the police and the military, hundreds of local villagers are patrolling the forests—day and night—to stop the illegal logging. On March 26, 2012, the Phnom Penh Post reported that 500 villagers from the Prey Lang area were patrolling the forest on 250 motorbikes. The Post reported the villagers “have vowed to continue patrols in coming days and to block a road used by rubber company CRCK if authorities don’t take action.”

Soem Sean, a village representative from Kampong Thom, said, “The reason we decided to do this is because the number of illegal loggers is increasing, but the authority has done nothing to stop these people. So we have to do it.”

Thai Bunleang, a Kuy elder, farmer, and Prey Lang Network activist, adds, “Without forest there is no life. In the Kuy language, ‘Prey Lang’ means ‘Our Forest.’ This forest is for everyone. Prey Lang is our forest, but it is your forest too. You can help save it.”

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EarthAction is a global network of over 2,000 civil society organizations in more than 160 countries, along with policymakers, journalists and citizens, who take timely, focused, action together to protect the global environment, preserve peace, and promote human rights. EarthAction has initiated over 90 global campaigns since its launch at the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992.

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For 40 years, Cultural Survival has partnered with Indigenous Peoples around the world to protect their lands, languages and cultures. At the request of Indigenous communities that are struggling to prevent environmental destruction in their territories, the Global Response program organizes international public-pressure campaigns to change the policies and behaviors of governments and corporations.

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For years the Prey Lang forest has been under attack from illegal road builders and loggers, agro-business, and mining companies who have made quick profits by extracting and exporting the forest's natural resources. The villagers have been unable to determine where the trees are taken, but it is believed that much of the wood is illegally smuggled into China and Vietnam where it is made into cheap patio furniture and other wood products that are exported around the world.

Paula Palmer, director of Cultural Survival's Global Response program, points out, "In 1970, 70 percent of Cambodia's land was covered with old-growth forests. Today it is only 3 percent. The Kuy people are calling on us to help them save what's left." Palmer adds, "Studies show that forests thrive best when they are managed by Indigenous communities, so it is important for the Prey Lang Community Network to play a role in managing the Prey Lang forest."

The Prey Lang Global Campaign calls on people everywhere to send a message to the Cambodian Prime Minister urging him to take immediate action to protect the Prey Lang forest. Specifically, the campaign supports the local indigenous people who are calling on Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen to:

- SUSPEND all logging and mining concessions in the greater Prey Lang area
- CONFER Prey Lang with protected status and enforce its protection
- COMMIT to sustainably managing the forest in cooperation with the Prey Lang Community Network

Campaigners note that messages can be sent to Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, care of the Cambodian UN Mission, 327 East 58th Street, New York NY 10022 USA, Email: Cambodia@un.int.

At earthaction.org/ourforest, people and organizations can add their name to a sign-on letter to Prime Minister Hun Sen, and request a free Prey Lang Action Kit.

Previous campaigns organized by EarthAction in collaboration with local groups faced with the destruction of their forests have resulted in saving the Lopè Forest Reserve in Gabon, Clayoquot Sound in British Columbia, Canada (both of which are now UN Biosphere Reserves), and the Imataca Forest in Venezuela.

Previous campaigns organized by Global Response with local groups have saved rainforests in Costa Rica, Venezuela, Nigeria, Honduras, Chile, and Nicaragua.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Prey Lang Community Network
<http://preylang.com/the-network/>
<http://ourpreylang.wordpress.com/>

Amnesty International video
<http://www.amnesty.org.au/poverty/comments/27241>

YouTube 5 minute video
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NJHEiYmleVo&feature=player_embedded#

CNN iReport, 2 minute video about the Avatar protest, May 2011:
<http://ireport.cnn.com/docs/DOC-613176?ref=feeds%2Flatest>

PRI's *The World*, 4 minute audio report of the Avatar protest, May 25, 2011
<http://www.theworld.org/2011/05/indigenous-protest-cambodia/>

List of media coverage of the May 2011 Avatar Protest:
<http://ourpreylang.wordpress.com/2011/05/26/prey-lang-avatars-in-world-news/>