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We Support “World Heritage, Blood Heritage” Campaign!

In solidarity with the Karen Indigenous Peoples of Thailand against the Declaration of Kaeng Krachan Forest Complex (KKFC) as a World Heritage Site

We object in the strongest terms to the declaration of Kaeng Krachan Forest Complex (KKFC), the ancestral lands of the Karen people, as a World Heritage Site on 26th July 2021. The World Heritage Committee has set a dangerous precedent by disregarding severe cases of reported human rights violations and history of the Karen people. Further, the very act of the Committee’s adoption of the KKFC as a World Heritage violates the fundamental rights of the Indigenous Peoples living in the area and international human rights law.

The Committee’s decision has been widely criticized and condemned by human rights bodies and CSOs from different parts of the world.

The Government of Thailand officially registered the KKFC on 26 November 2014 for enlisting it as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This was rejected thrice in 2015, 2016 and 2019¹ respectively. The World Heritage Committee, in its meetings, had requested the Thai Government to address the human rights violations against the Karen people following submission of several evidence to the committee². Further the Office of the High Commission on Human Rights (OHCHR), UN experts and several other human rights and conservation organizations had urged the UNESCO to defer the declaration on account of these violations of rights by the KKFC park authorities in the name of conservation³.

The Committee’s decision of 26th July came as a surprise because none of the human rights cases, including the land rights of the people within the KKFC area, had been addressed by the government of Thailand. The decision represents a low moral point in the history of UNESCO. No attempt was made to include the Karen people in the decision-making processes. The decision goes against some of the most fundamental principles, purposes and values of UNESCO itself, as well as against the UN Declaration on the rights of Indigenous Peoples and the principles of the United Nations according to the UN Charter.

The Committee’s decision is indicatively, a result of a highly politicized lobbying based on the vested interest of its members. Even the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Francisco Cali, was allowed to intervene only after the adoption of the decision by the Committee.

¹ [UNESCO Adds Thai Park to World Heritage List, Amid Karen Rights Concerns — Radio Free Asia \(rfa.org\)](http://www.radiofreeasia.org/news/20210727-unesco-adds-thai-park-to-world-heritage-list-amid-karen-rights-concerns/)

² [Kaeng Krachan added to world heritage list \(bangkokpost.com\)](http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/2021/07/27/kaeng-krachan-added-to-world-heritage-list/)

³ [OHCHR | Thailand: UN experts warn against heritage status for Kaeng Krachan national park](http://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2021/07/1)

We are disappointed that incessant dissent, appeals and rights issues of the Karen People has been completely ignored and not heard. It is a deliberate act by the Committee of turning a blind eye to the litany of sufferings of the Karen people to manipulate the course and outcome of the decision regarding the application of KKFC as a World Heritage Site.

The Karen People have been tormented since the establishment of the National Park in 1996 without any prior consultation and sowed the seed of conflict in the area. Their survival was brought to the brink by stripping them of their ancestral rights. In 2021, harassment against the Karen people escalated and over 80 community members were arrested and 28 of them, including seven women and a child, were criminally charged for encroachment⁴. We are intensely distressed that worse is yet to come as the lives of thousands of Karens hangs on a thread and their culture is being wiped out as the World Heritage Site is implemented.

We wonder, what heritage and whose heritage that the world is going to preserve by jeopardizing the lifeline and identity of ordinary communities? Surely, the voices and cries of the Karen people will not wane!

We therefore urge the General Assembly of States Parties to use the upcoming 50th Anniversary of the World Heritage Convention as an occasion to bring the decision-making of the World Heritage Committee in line with the principles and standards of the United Nations and UNESCO, and the aims of the World Heritage Convention.

We also call upon the Government of Thailand to accept the fact that the issue remains unresolved and honorably accept the request made by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to allow him to conduct an onsite visit to assess the situation and aid in finding an amicable solution.

⁴ https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=27333&LangID=E&fbclid=IwAR375Km-5Ki84tDqeOGI1HiGaS3a_NMD5ga7Y_jgdfjiZft0GhkBw8m_1ac