



Statement on the First Session of the Salween Peace Park General Assembly – April 5th 2019

On this day, the 5th of April 2019, we the indigenous Karen communities of the Salween Peace Park gather to mark a moment of sorrow, and one of hope. Today marks the formal establishment of the Salween Peace Park General Assembly, with the swearing in of its 106 members who represent communities from the Park's 26 village tracts, Mutraw District Karen National Union, and Karen civil society.

Between the 3rd and 5th of April the General Assembly (GA) held its first session. GA members, elected by their local constituents, selected an 11-member Governing Committee and established a series of guiding rules and regulations. To drive the further progress of the Salween Peace Park, the General Assembly also established nine working groups responsible for Building Self Determination, Dispute Resolution and Reconciliation, Sustainable Natural Resource Management, External Relations, Basic Infrastructure and Economic Development, Land Governance and Management, Cultural Preservation and Revitalisation, Fundraising and Capacity Building, and Financial Management. These working groups will hold ongoing meetings at the guidance of the Governing Committee. Over the next year the General Assembly has prioritized reforestation through tree-planting, and to work with communities to help them cooperate in waste management and controlling forest fires. To support future work, a Salween Peace Park Master Plan was also drafted. The General Assembly will reconvene in 2020.

This day also marks the one-year anniversary of the death of Saw O Moo, a respected indigenous community leader and one of the Salween Peace Park's strongest and most committed advocates who was killed by Burmese soldiers on his way home from providing aid to IDPs displaced during an illegal Tatmadaw incursion into Karen territory. One year on Saw Oh Moo's body has still not been found, and his family have been unable to perform a traditional burial ceremony. Many communities in the area also remain displaced, living as IDPs in the forest and struggling for food. On the morning of April 5th the General Assembly gathered in memorial of Saw O Moo. After a moment of silence, speeches remembering his life, achievements, and passion for indigenous Karen rights and traditions were held by his wife Naw Paw Tha, his brother Saw Dah Be and the President of the General Assembly Saw Paul Sein Twa. This was followed by the screening of a documentary about Saw O Moo.

Although Saw O Moo has passed, our community vision of the Salween Peace Park and the legacy of his contributions to it live on. The General Assembly establishes a democratic and representative forum for the Salween Peace Park's people to achieve our vision of a sustainable and peaceful landscape founded upon our culture and traditions. With the swearing in of the General Assembly's members a key step has been taken towards achieving a stable life and meaningful peace for the Salween Peace Park's communities. "Saw O Moo's commitments to indigenous rights will be continued and built upon, even though he didn't have the chance to witness it." said Naw Paw Tha "He did his part, now we will do our part, and the foundations that we have laid will be passed down to the next generation."

Members of the Salween Peace Park Governing Committee:

- 1 Saw Paul Sein Twa - President
- 2 Saw D Gay Junior - Vice President
- 3 Saw KloHtoo - Secretary
- 4 NawBu Mu Paw - Joint Secretary
- 5 Saw Day Htoo
- 6 NawPehWa
- 7 Saw Tender
- 8 NawK'nyaw Paw
- 9 Saw Thaw Kler
- 10 NawPlerShweh
- 11 SawRay Der Moo

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