



# PERU AT THE CLIMATE CROSSROADS

HOW SAWETO AND INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES CAN GUIDE PERU DOWN THE RIGHT PATH



**AIDSESP**  
Asociación Interétnica  
de Desarrollo de la  
Selva Peruana



**ALTO TAMAYA  
SAWETO**



**Rainforest  
Foundation US**



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**Front cover:** Diana Rios Spokesperson & Treasurer, Alto Tamaya-Saweto. © If Not Us Then Who?

**Back cover:** Training the next generations of rainforest defenders in Saweto.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In September 2015, in the capital city of the Amazonian Region of Ucayali in Peru, a simple document was handed to the Asheninka indigenous Widows of the Alto Tamaya-Saweto community.<sup>1</sup> This paper represented to them the culmination of a tragic decade long fight, which saw their forests ravaged by illegal logging, their families threatened by criminals, their complaints ignored by authorities, and four of their husbands, Edwin Chota, Jorge Ríos Pérez, Leoncio Quincima Meléndez and Francisco Pinedo, shot dead by illegal loggers.<sup>2</sup> After this painful journey, they have finally received their long sought land title, providing them with the rights to 80,000 hectares of Amazon rainforest, an area almost three times the size of the country of Maldives.<sup>3</sup>

The arduous fight of this community, and the destruction of their forests, is characteristic of the wider struggle of indigenous communities in Peru to obtain land title and to conserve the forests they have been proven to protect better than anyone else.<sup>4</sup> Peru, along with Bolivia, suffers one of the worst annual deforestation rates of Latin America,<sup>5</sup> losing an area twice the size of Hong Kong every year.<sup>6</sup> The victims of this destruction are indigenous communities that live in the Peruvian Amazon and who still have over 20 million hectares of pending land title applications,<sup>7</sup> an area almost twice the size of Guatemala.<sup>8</sup>

These harsh facts fly in the face of Peru's climate change commitments, which aim to conserve 75% of its forests while reducing to zero net deforestation by 2020.<sup>9</sup> With Peru still holding the Presidency of the UN Climate Change Convention Conference of the Parties, in the run up to the Paris COP 21, it has a lot to do to demonstrate it can abide by its promises.

While Peru signed a letter of intent with Norway and Germany in 2014, for 300 million USD of finance to help the country conserve its forests,<sup>10</sup> it simultaneously approved a packet of controversial laws that weakened environmental protection,<sup>11</sup> to stimulate investment in the extractive, agricultural and infrastructure sectors, the very same sectors that cause the deforestation they promised to stop.<sup>12</sup> Additional research presented in this report can reveal that, while indigenous community's customary forested lands in Peru are recognised as high carbon capture

areas,<sup>13</sup> offering Peru the opportunity to lead the world in forest conservation by handing over land titles to indigenous communities encompassing 20 million hectares of the Amazon,<sup>14</sup> the obstacles in place to achieving this desirable goal are considerable:

- It takes 27 bureaucratic processes for native and indigenous communities to be recognised and to finally receive their land title, with each process taking sometimes even decades to progress, often mired by corruption and state indifference, and at huge personal and financial cost to the communities concerned;<sup>15</sup>
- One salient example is the twelve years it took the indigenous community of Saweto to receive its land title, tragically contrasted by the one year it took to hand over their customary land to logging concessions in 2003;<sup>16</sup>
- For logging and mining concessions, whose owners have comparatively far more resources to reduce time spent on bureaucracy than indigenous communities, they are able to expedite their way through 3 and 7 bureaucratic steps respectively, to gain their concessions, fast-tracking processes within those steps so that at worst they may be granted a concession in a period of 3-5 years, and at best under one year;
- While only 50 campesino and native/indigenous land titles have been approved since 2007,<sup>17</sup> a comparative 556 logging concessions were approved in a 2 year period between 2002-2004<sup>18</sup> covering almost 7 million hectares of the Amazon,<sup>19</sup> with a massive 35,658 mining concessions approved since 2007,<sup>20</sup> many of which overlap with indigenous territories;
- Other research has shown how almost 84% of the Peruvian Amazon is covered by oil blocks,<sup>21</sup> many also overlapping indigenous territory.

These damning statistics point to the priority of an extractive model of development that puts at risk the Peruvian Government's own international climate change forest conservation commitments and which must be reversed. This economic model of development has also seen 61 environmental and land defenders being killed in 2002-2015,<sup>22</sup> many of these



**Above:** Alto Tamaya-Saweto

indigenous communities protesting against the destruction of their forests and land by extractive sector projects.

If Peru is to fulfil its climate change obligations and its historic debt to indigenous communities like Saweto, it can take one easy step: simplify and expedite the land titling process for all the indigenous communities that have pending land title applications, acknowledging the historic debt that is owed, not only to communities like Saweto, but to the environment they have protected for centuries.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### For the Peruvian Government:

- Simplify and expedite the land titling process for indigenous communities with pending indigenous land claims that cover over 20 million ha of forest, as one way of meeting Peru's climate change obligations
- Designate adequate public funds to address indigenous peoples' land titling and territorial aspirations
- Recognize the importance of titling indigenous peoples' collective lands over titling private and individual parcels of land
- Withdraw concessions and other rights that overlay indigenous territories
- Promote Indigenous REDD proposed by AIDSESP, to ensure that emissions reduction projects recognise the rights of indigenous peoples
- Homogenise the differences in information contained by the Ministry of Agriculture, the National Titling and Registration Program (PETT), the Organism for the Formalisation of Informal Property (COFOPRI) and the Regional Governments, to count on a single, official and up to date database on native community land titling

### For Peru's International REDD donors:

- Prioritise the use of international funds to address indigenous peoples' territorial land title demands, and go beyond existing targets agreed with the Peruvian Government, to ensure it meets its obligation of conserving 54 million hectares of Amazon forest

## SECTION A – CASE STUDY. FROM DEGRADATION TO CONSERVATION: THE SAWETO COMMUNITY'S STRUGGLE TO SAVE THEIR FOREST AND LAND

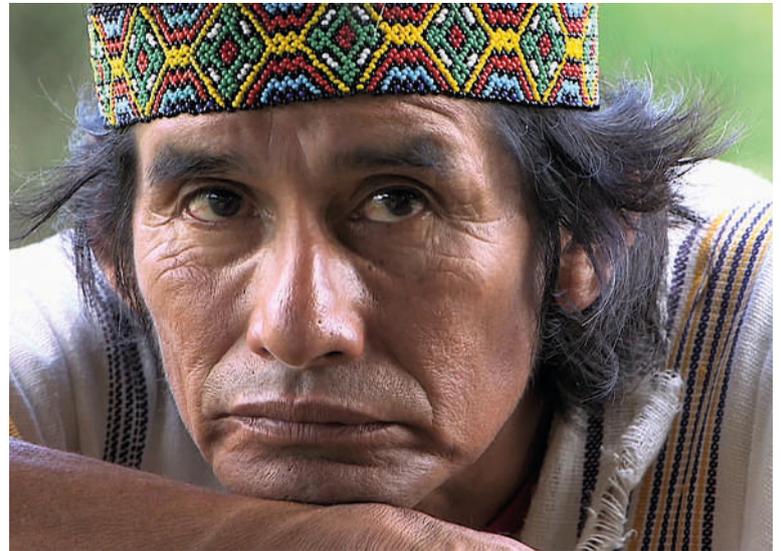
The plight of the Alto Tamaya-Saweto community provides an all at once tragic and compelling example of the obstacles and opportunities in the way of Peru's indigenous peoples, and for the Peruvian Government in relation to its climate change obligations. The Community is located deep in the Amazon rainforest along the border with Brazil in the Region of Ucayali.<sup>23</sup> The 80,000 hectare community title is the ancestral home of 32 Asheninka families, who have maintained small farms, fished and hunted throughout their forest for generations.<sup>24</sup> Isolated from the rest of Peru—it is nearly four days' boat journey to the regional capital, Pucallpa.

In the early 2000s the Peruvian government approved Forest Law 27308,<sup>25</sup> opening the flood-gates for logging concessions, which by 2004 encompassed almost 7 million hectares of the Peruvian Amazon.<sup>26</sup> Three of those concessions overlapped Saweto's native territory,<sup>27</sup> bringing with it not only formal logging, but illegal logging as well, setting the stage for what would turn out to be over a decade of violent conflict between Saweto's leaders, who wanted to protect their ancestral forest, and the loggers migrating from Brazil and Pucallpa, who came to cut it down for profit.

*If it hadn't been for the murders the State wouldn't have ever paid attention to what was happening in our community.*

– Ergilia Rengifo Lopez,  
President of the Saweto Community

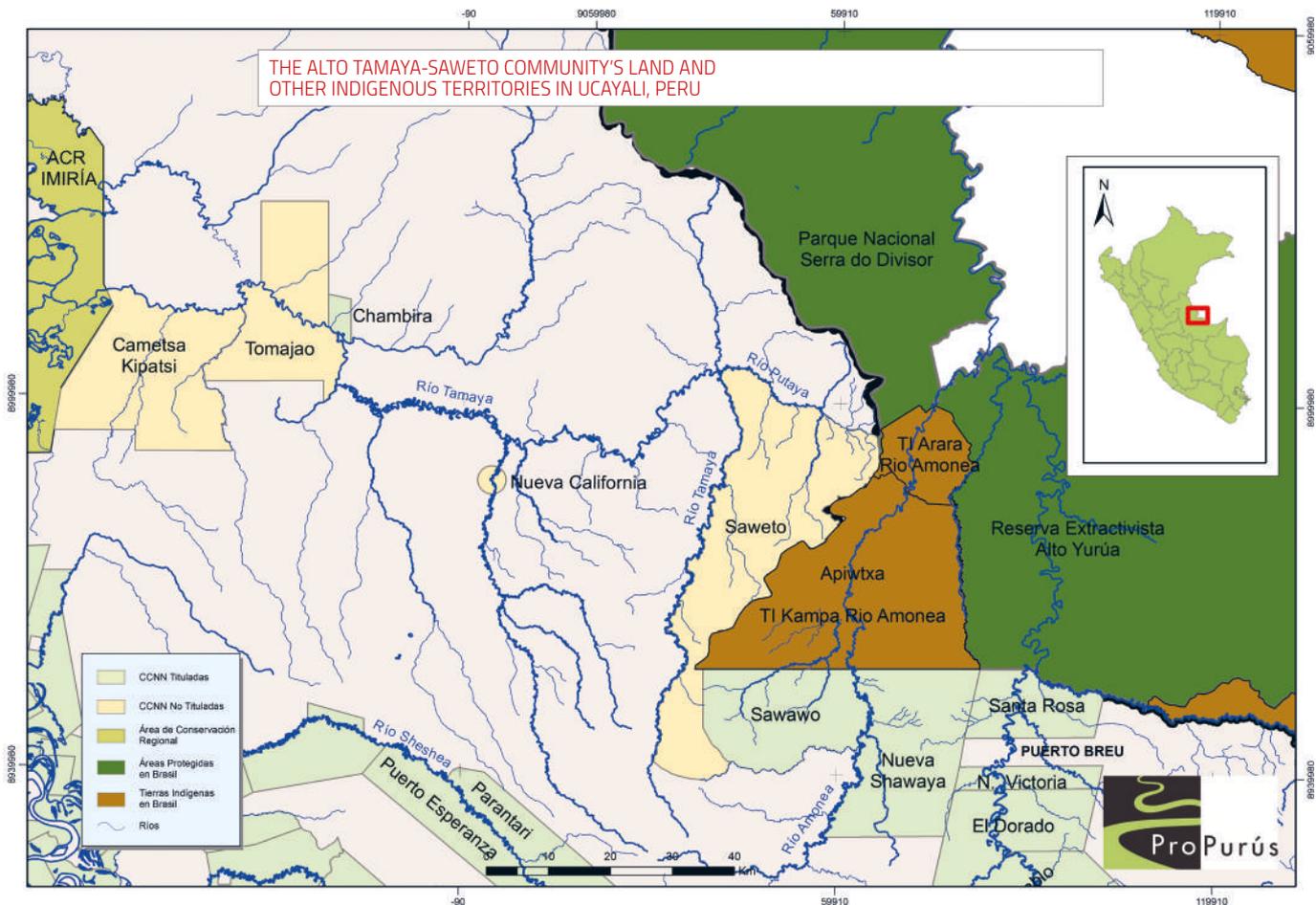
To protect Saweto's territory from these threats, the Community leaders first submitted their land title application in 2003<sup>28</sup> and actively denounced the illegal logging happening on their land. Between 2003 and 2004 Edwin Chota and other Saweto leaders placed 4 complaints with the authorities and managed to once confiscate illegal timber being transported from their land<sup>29</sup> - but the authorities repeatedly ignored them and their land title requests went unheeded. As the conflict intensified, Chota requested government protection in 2005



**Above:** Edwin Chota of the Alto Tamaya-Saweto Community.

due to continued threats by loggers, but once again was ignored.<sup>30</sup> In 2006, Chota denounced the illegal logger Manuel Ríos Pezo for threatening local indigenous leaders, but yet again no action was taken.<sup>31</sup> Between 2007 and September 2014 this same pattern was repeated year on year, until the tragic murders of Edwin Chota and Jorge Ríos Pérez, Leoncio Quincima Meléndez and Francisco Pinedo, at the hands of the very same illegal loggers they had repeatedly denounced.<sup>32</sup>

After the murders, when Saweto gained the international spotlight in the months leading up to the COP 20 in Lima, Peru, the Government removed the logging concessions from their territory,<sup>33</sup> paving the way for their title to be approved. Saweto voted in new community leaders in December 2014, with the widow of murdered leader Jorge Rios, Ergilia Rengifo, and her daughter, Diana Rios, being elected President and Treasurer, along with several other women leaders. As they continued their fight for land, the public registry twice annulled their title in 2015, once for technical reasons and once claiming a superimposition with a mysteriously created palm oil concession.<sup>34</sup> Nonetheless they persisted, until the President of the Regional Government finally delivered to the Saweto President Ergilia Rengifo their land title in September 2015, at the Aseninka Bi-National Congress.<sup>35</sup> It took the blood of their leaders, profound tenacity in the face of seemingly



*We have laid down our lives for our territory. But it's not just for us, it's for everyone, because the forests are disappearing.*

– Diana, Treasurer of the Saweto Community

insurmountable obstacles, for the community to legalize ownership of land that had been their home for decades.

The 80,000 hectare area is considered some of the most biodiverse forest in the Peruvian Amazon,<sup>36</sup> and the community aim to conserve that forest and access funds available through Peru's National Program for the Conservation of Forests<sup>37</sup> (which funnels international financing under Peru's Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation-REDD- scheme), for which they may, if successful, receive 3 USD annually<sup>38</sup> for every hectare

of forest they choose to conserve from their 80,000 hectare area. This could amount to a significant annual income for a community that for 12 years faced poverty, violence and state indifference, and it could also make a difference for the other indigenous communities who have title covering 15 million hectares of Amazon forest.<sup>39</sup> Saweto's long struggle for conservation and sustainability is emblematic of the many indigenous communities across Peru that have pending land titles, and that also struggle with overlapping concessions, but also offers hope for the kind of sustainable development path Peru could choose, if it prioritized indigenous land titling and conservation, over extractive sector development.

2002

DECREE 029-2002-AG GRANTS LOGGING CONCESSIONS ON SAWETO'S ANCESTRAL TERRITORY

3 MAY 2002

SAWETO REQUESTS TITLE TO LAND TO REGIONAL GOVERNMENT

OCT 2002

SAWETO COMMUNITY PETITIONS FOR RECOGNITION AND REGISTRY

18 OCT 2002

2003

PETITION FOR RECOGNITION IS APPROVED

22 APR 2003

RECOGNITION AND REGISTRY OF PETITION IS CONFIRMED

16 JUN 2003

AFTER NO RESPONSE A 2ND REQUEST FOR TITLE IS MADE TO REGIONAL GOVERNMENT

17 JUN 2003

THIS TRIGGERS SOCIOECONOMIC STUDY AND SOIL STUDY

2004

COMMUNITY ISSUES COMPLAINT ABOUT LAND TITLING DELAY TO REGIONAL GOVERNMENT

2004

2005

COMMUNITY ISSUES MULTIPLE COMPLAINTS ABOUT ILLEGAL LOGGING & DELAY IN THE TITLE PROCESS

2005

2006

COMMUNITY ISSUES FURTHER MULTIPLE COMPLAINTS ABOUT ILLEGAL LOGGING & DELAY IN THE TITLE PROCESS

2006

2007

ONCE AGAIN THE COMMUNITY ISSUES MULTIPLE COMPLAINTS ABOUT ILLEGAL LOGGING & DELAY IN THE TITLE PROCESS

2007

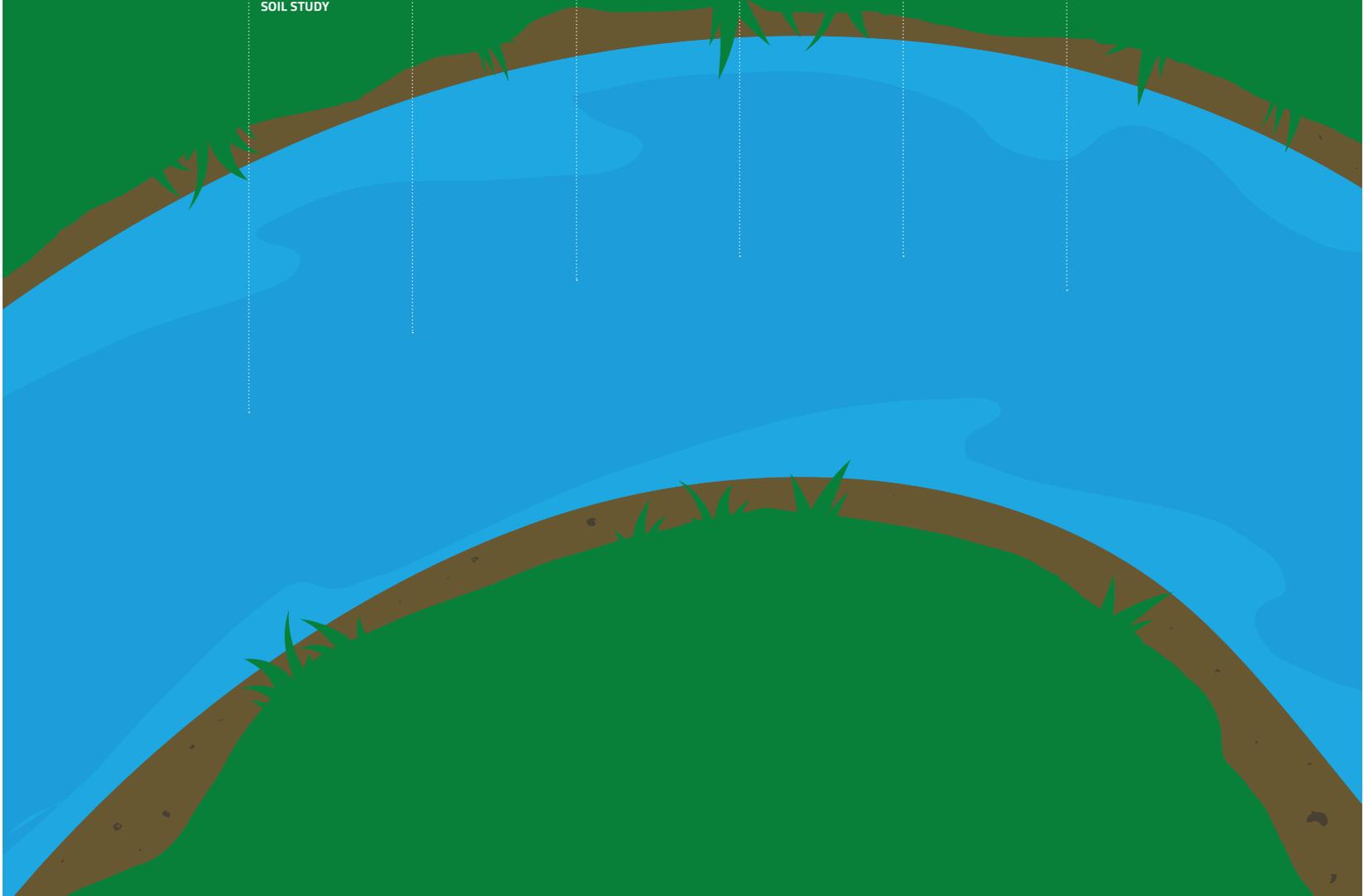
2008

SAWETO CONTINUES ITS REPEATED COMPLAINTS ABOUT ILLEGAL LOGGING & DELAY IN THE TITLE PROCESS

2008

# A TIMELINE OF STRUGGLE

THE ALTO TAMAYA-SAWETO COMMUNITY'S FIGHT FOR LAND TITLE



2009

2010

2013

2014

2015

THE COMMITTEE FOR THE FORMALIZATION OF PROPERTY RIGHTS AND TITLING NOTIFIES THE COMMUNITY TITLING IS UNDER CONSIDERATION

2009

THE COMMITTEE FOR THE FORMALIZATION OF PROPERTY RIGHTS AND TITLING AGAIN NOTIFIES THE COMMUNITY TITLING IS UNDER CONSIDERATION

2010

COMMUNITY PETITIONS FOR FOREST CONCESSIONS TO BE REMOVED FROM THEIR TERRITORIES

5 APR 2013

RELEVANT AUTHORITY FINALLY CARRIES OUT THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC STUDY OF COMMUNITY AFTER 10 YEARS OF DELAY

5 NOV 2013

THE FORESTRY DEPARTMENT OF UCAYALI REJECTS SAWETO'S PETITION FOR REMOVAL OF LOGGING CONCESSIONS

29 JAN 2014

COMMUNITY APPEALS THE FORESTRY DEPARTMENT'S RULING

13 FEB 2014

THE FORESTRY DEPARTMENT OF UCAYALI REJECTS SAWETO'S APPEAL FOR THE EXCLUSION OF LOGGING CONCESSIONS FROM THEIR TERRITORY

18 MAR 2014

THE COMMUNITY ONCE AGAIN PETITIONS FOR THE REVERSAL OF THE DECISION THAT APPROVED THE LOGGING CONCESSIONS

18 JUN 2014

THE FOUR SAWETO COMMUNITY LEADERS EDWIN CHOTA, JORGE RIOS, LEONCIO QUINTICIMA AND FRANCISCO PINEDO, ARE BRUTALLY MURDERED BY ILLEGAL LOGGERS

01 SEP 2014

WIDOWS OF SAWETO INFORM PUCALLPA AUTHORITIES OF MURDERS

10 SEP 2014

NATIONAL GOVERNMENT PROPOSES JOINT MINISTRY TO OVERSEE SAWETO'S TITLING PROCESS

14 SEP 2014

AGRICULTURAL MINISTRY REJECTS GOVERNMENT'S SUGGESTION AS INFRINGING ON REGIONAL DUTIES, AND THE UCAYALI REGIONAL GOVERNMENT RETORTS THAT THE PROPOSED TIMETABLE FOR THE TITLING PROCESS IS UNREALISTIC

14 SEP 2014

A REGIONAL OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE OF SAWETO'S TITLING PROCESS IS CREATED

14 SEP 2014

THE FORESTRY DEPARTMENT OF UCAYALI FINALLY APPROVES THE APPEAL FOR THE EXCLUSION OF LOGGING CONCESSIONS OVER SAWETO'S TERRITORY

14 SEP 2014

THE REQUIRED SOIL SURVEY IS PRODUCED BY THE RELEVANT AUTHORITY

25 NOV 2014

THE SOIL SURVEY IS APPROVED

25 NOV 2014

BUT THE REGIONAL OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE FOR SAWETO'S TITLING IS SUDDENLY DISBANDED WITHOUT ANY ACTIONS TAKEN

15 DEC 2014

THE PROPOSED DEMARCATED AREA FOR SAWETO'S TERRITORY IS APPROVED AND THE TITLE IS PROPOSED

15 DEC 2014

SAWETO'S LEADERS PETITION REGIONAL GOVERNMENT TO RE-INITIATE THE PROCESS THAT WAS STOPPED BY THE DISBANDING OF THE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

01 JAN 2015

THE REGIONAL GOVERNMENT'S OFFICE INFORMS SAWETO NO OBJECTION WAS PRESENTED TO THE TITLE

09 JAN 2015

THE REGIONAL GOVERNMENT'S OFFICE DELAYS TITLE ANNOUNCEMENT TO ALLOW FOR ADDITIONAL PARTIES TO CONTEST THE DECISION

16 JAN 2015

A RESOLUTION IS ANNOUNCED FINALLY APPROVING THE TITLE, PENDING THE REGIONAL GOVERNMENT'S APPROVAL

19 JAN 2015

SAWETO PETITIONS OMBUDSMAN FOR HELP TO PRESSURE THE REGIONAL GOVERNMENT TO APPROVE THE TITLE

22 JAN 2015

THE REGIONAL GOVERNMENT FINALLY APPROVES THE TITLE, AND GIVES A SYMBOLIC TITLE TO ONE OF SAWETO'S LEADERS

30 JAN 2015

SUDDENLY THE NATIONAL PUBLIC REGISTRY ANNULLS THE TITLE DUE TO FAULTY MAPS

23 FEB 2015

THE REGIONAL GOVERNMENT'S OFFICE PREQUALIFIES AND REDRAFTS THE MAPS

18 MAR 2015

THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE CONFIRMS TO SAWETO THE REMOVAL OF CONCESSIONS FROM THEIR TERRITORY

05 APR 2015

THE REGIONAL OFFICE REGISTER'S THE LEADERS OF SAWETO & PROMISES TO SPEED UP THE FINAL ELEMENTS OF THE TITLING PROCESS

09 APR 2015

SAWETO PRESSURES THE REGIONAL GOVERNMENT ONCE AGAIN TO EXPEDITE THE TITLING PROCESS

15 MAY 2015

SAWETO AND THE OMBUDSMAN REQUEST STATUS OF LAND TITLE PROCESS

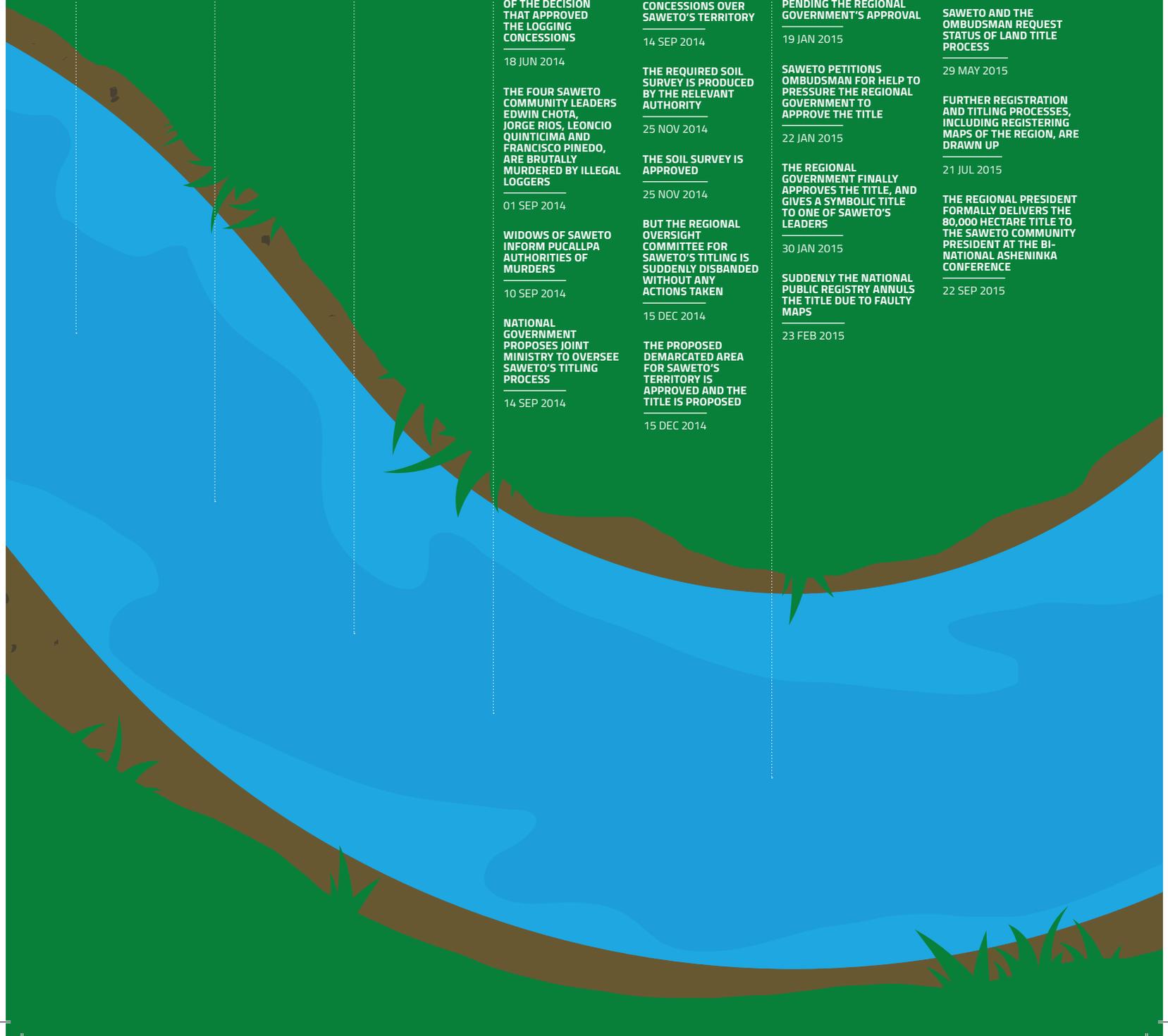
29 MAY 2015

FURTHER REGISTRATION AND TITLING PROCESSES, INCLUDING REGISTERING MAPS OF THE REGION, ARE DRAWN UP

21 JUL 2015

THE REGIONAL PRESIDENT FORMALLY DELIVERS THE 80,000 HECTARE TITLE TO THE SAWETO COMMUNITY PRESIDENT AT THE BI-NATIONAL ASHENINKA CONFERENCE

22 SEP 2015

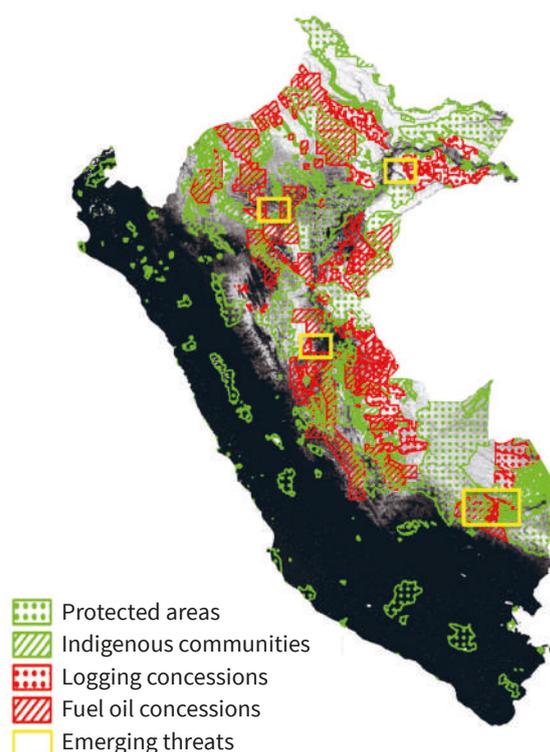


## SECTION B – INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES AS DELIVERERS OF PERU'S FOREST CONSERVATION COMMITMENTS

Saweto's fight is symbolic of a global struggle. Indigenous peoples and local communities have legal or official rights to over 500 million hectares of forests worldwide, which collectively store roughly 37.7 billion tons of carbon, almost equivalent to the carbon captured in all of North America's forests.<sup>40</sup> While significant, this number is still far less than the estimated 65% percent of the world's land which they manage and control under customary systems.<sup>41</sup> Legal recognition of indigenous lands and management systems therefore represents an important opportunity to protect forests worldwide and mitigate climate change, and with Peru's vast rainforests populated by indigenous peoples, it is uniquely suited to capitalise on this advantage.

According to the Interethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Amazon (AIDESEP), which represents indigenous forest communities across Peru, there are 1,240 communities seeking recognition, titles or extension of their land.<sup>42</sup> Indigenous and native community owned land encompass 15 million hectares of the Peruvian Amazon, with a further 20 million hectares of pending indigenous land titling applications unanswered by the Government.<sup>43</sup> The indigenous owned lands in the Peruvian Amazon have been proven to hold high carbon stocks,<sup>44</sup> with one study demonstrating that 9 million hectares of indigenous owned land accounted for 30% of Peru's total above ground carbon stocks,<sup>45</sup> without taking into consideration the remaining 6 million hectares of indigenous owned land<sup>46</sup> or of the possibility of the carbon potential in the areas covering the 20 million hectares of pending indigenous land title applications.<sup>47</sup> These areas also have significantly reduced rates of deforestation compared to the national average.<sup>48</sup> They are therefore compelling areas of high carbon stocks and reduced deforestation which should be prioritized by the Peruvian Government's climate change policies, but which instead are under threat from extractive sector development – with 84% of the Peruvian Amazon covered by oil blocks.<sup>49</sup>

This important avenue of conservation is not being maximized. While the Forest Investment Program's Dedicated Grant Mechanism, has within its goals the titling of 440 indigenous or native communities, and



**Map above:** threats in logging and fuel oil concessions vs. current protections in government and nongovernment administered protected areas, indigenous communities, and extractive reserves. Yellow boxes highlight emerging threats of oil palm plantations and informal gold mining<sup>50</sup>

the Joint Norway-Peru-Germany Declaration calls for indigenous land titling of 5 million hectares by 2017 as a benchmark,<sup>51</sup> this is not enough. If only five million of the 20 million hectares being demanded by indigenous and native communities are titled, it leaves 15 million hectares under risk of deforestation from the extractive/agricultural conversion that Peru's Government is actively pursuing through its economic policies.<sup>52</sup> And with an indigenous land titling process as bureaucratically arduous as it is,<sup>53</sup> in comparison to the relative ease of granting logging and mining concessions,<sup>54</sup> Peru will have a very difficult time reaching their zero net deforestation goal by 2020.

The Peruvian Government should therefore expedite the call of indigenous and native communities to title 20 million hectares of Amazonian forest, by simplifying the land titling process for them, as one route of securing its international forest conservation climate change mitigation commitments. Such a move would signal a strong and committed intent in the global fight for the reduction in emissions from deforestation and forest degradation.



*Lands recognised as ‘native communities’ official deforestation rates [in Peru] are only approximately 0.1 % per year (less than half the national rate). Rates of deforestation in indigenous territories are likely to be significantly lower, however, due to distortions in satellite forest monitoring systems which are unable to accurately differentiate between permanent deforestation and temporary clearance from rotational farming.*

– Forest Peoples Program and AIDSESEP

**Above:** Alto Tamaya-Saweto Community, Ucayali, Peru

**Left:** The Alto Tamaya-Saweto Community can secure a future for its children and help conserve Peru’s Forests

## SECTION C – EXTRACTIVE DESTRUCTION VS INDIGENOUS CONSERVATION

Peru has opted for economic growth based on extractive sector expansion, at the expense of indigenous communities like Saweto, and at the expense of its environment. Proof of this can be seen by a simple comparison: only 50 campesino and native/indigenous land titles have been approved since 2007,<sup>55</sup> compared to 556 logging concessions that were approved over a 2 year period between

*Only 50 campesino and native / indigenous land titles have been approved since 2007, compared to 556 logging concessions and 35,658 mining concessions*

2002-2004<sup>56</sup> covering almost 7 million hectares of the Peruvian Amazon,<sup>57</sup> with a massive 35,658 mining concessions approved since 2007,<sup>58</sup> many of which overlap with indigenous territories. Additional studies have found that almost 84% of the Peruvian Amazon is covered by oil blocks,<sup>59</sup> many also overlapping indigenous territory, while a rush for gold mining is having a devastating effect on the forests of Madre de Dios, leading to a tripling of deforestation since 2008.<sup>60</sup>

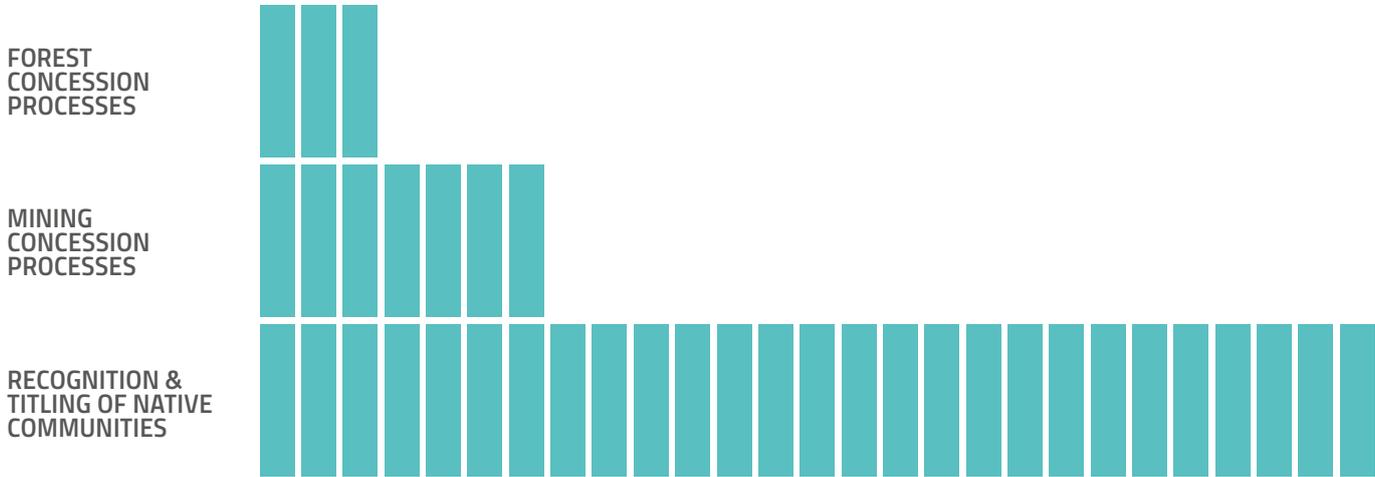
The vast majority of mineral deposits are located near indigenous community lands<sup>61</sup> resulting in extensive conflicts over land and the environmental impacts of mining projects. Peru's Human Rights Ombudsman documented 1935 social conflicts of opposition to mining projects between 2006-2014,<sup>62</sup> while the NGO Global Witness found that 80% of the cases of killed environmental and land defenders in 2002-2014 related to protests against extractive sector projects.<sup>63</sup>

Last year's passage of Law 30230 fuels these conflicts, having removed the Environment Ministry's power to make new natural reserves free of extractive activity, and reducing fines for environmental violations.<sup>64</sup> The formal title of the law states the "establishment of fiscal measures, the simplification of procedures and permits for the promotion and dynamism of investment in the country",<sup>65</sup> a simplified process which stands in direct contradiction to the long, arduous process that indigenous communities have to go through in order to get title. Communities often have to self-finance their titling efforts, navigate their way through corruption, inaction and state inefficiency, over 27 bureaucratic processes,<sup>66</sup> that can take anywhere from 10 to 25 years, in the case of communities like Saweto<sup>67</sup> and Nuevo Amanecer Hawai.<sup>68</sup>

**Below:** Gold mining is devastating forests in Peru



# BUREAUCRATIC PROCESSES IT TAKES TO BE GRANTED AN INDIGENOUS LAND TITLE, COMPARED TO LOGGING AND MINING CONCESSIONS<sup>69</sup>



*It takes 27 bureaucratic processes for native and indigenous communities to be recognised and receive their land title, compared to the far simpler steps needed to get a logging or mining concession.*

**MINING CONCESSIONS APPROVED 2007-2015**

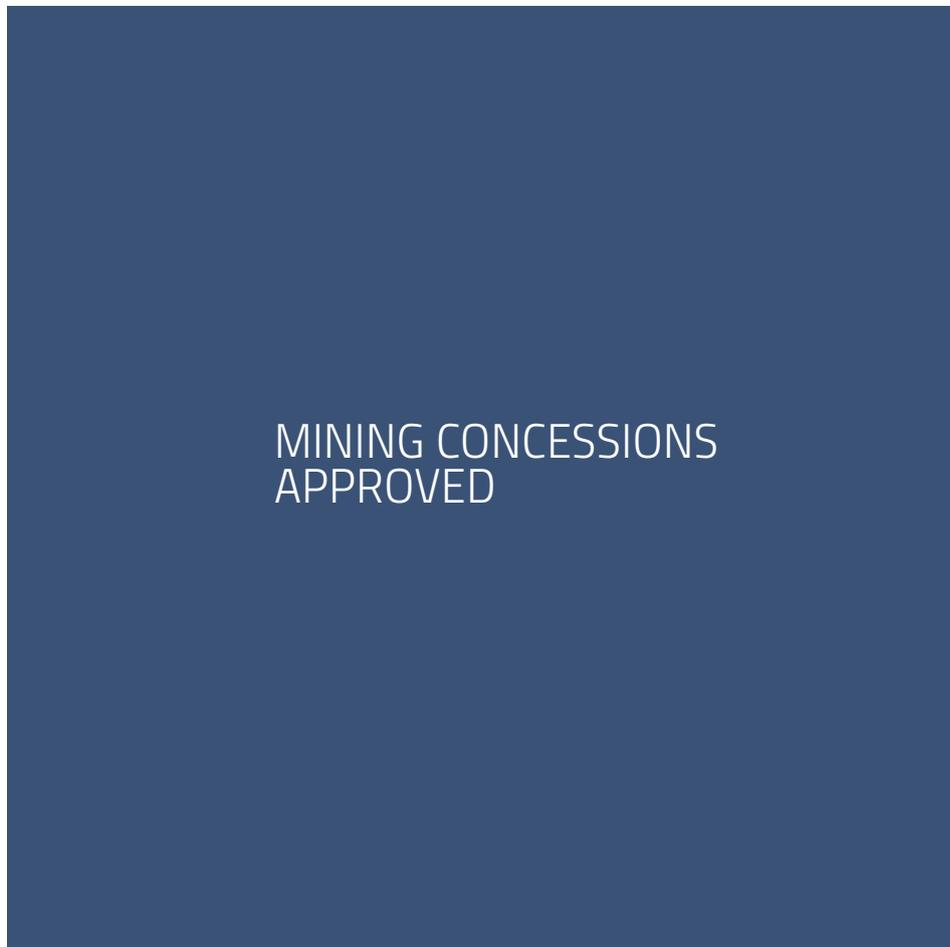
**35658**  
CONCESSIONS

**LOGGING CONCESSIONS APPROVED 2002-2004**

**556**  
CONCESSIONS

**APPROVED TITLED COMMUNITIES 2007-2015**

**50**  
TITLES



## SECTION D – PERU'S INTERNATIONAL CLIMATE CHANGE COMMITMENTS UNDER THREAT

As the world meets for the 21st United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris in December,<sup>70</sup> all participating countries will be focused on addressing the most important issue of our time: how to mitigate and adapt to climate change. Forests are crucial in protecting us from this threat, as they regulate our climate, conserve biodiversity and store vast amounts of carbon dioxide,<sup>71</sup> and indigenous communities have been proven to be some of the most effective stewards of these forests.<sup>72</sup> Nowhere is this more evident than in Peru.

*One study indicates that 9 million hectares of indigenous owned land accounts for 30% of Peru's total above ground carbon stocks, not taking into account a further 6 million hectares of forest owned by indigenous communities or the 20 million hectares of pending land title applications.*

Fifty percent of the country's territory is covered by some of the most biologically diverse forests globally, and is the second largest extent of tropical rainforests in Latin America, after Brazil, covering almost 73 million hectares of land.<sup>73</sup> During the past few years however, the World Resources Institute claims a deforestation rate of 250,000 ha per year,<sup>74</sup> contributing to half of Peru's total greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>75</sup> The Government's goal is to reduce to zero net deforestation in an area of 54 million hectares of primary forest by 2020,<sup>76</sup> thus reducing the country's greenhouse gas emissions in an effort to make it a major future recipient of global carbon offset investments. To this end, Peru has received almost half a billion USD for its Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD) initiative, the majority of which comes from Norway and Germany, amounting to USD300 million, and the Forest Investment Program, amounting to USD50 million.<sup>77</sup> But these commitments are under threat from a variety of factors.

THREATS TO FORESTS/CARBON SEQUESTRATION – TABLE<sup>86</sup>

TYPE	AREA, ha	TOTAL AG CARBON STOCK, Pg
<b>Threats</b>		
Selective logging	6,417,552	0.68
Oil concession (<500 m ASL)	13,226,773	1.24
Oil concession (500–2000 m)	2,959,029	0.24
Oil concession (>2000 m)	76,231	0.04
Infrastructure, animal and crop farming	1,400,000	0.14
<b>Total threats</b>	<b>22,679,585</b>	<b>2.34</b>
<b>Emerging threats</b>		
Artisanal gold mining	37,831	0.01
Oil palm mplantations	9,684	0.001

With widespread illegality,<sup>78</sup> rampant corruption<sup>79</sup> and institutional weaknesses across the forest sector,<sup>80</sup> it is difficult to see how Peru will meet these obligations unless it prioritises policies that conserve, rather than deforest, the Amazon. For example, there are over 20 million hectares of oil, infrastructure, mining and logging concessions assigned to the lowland Amazonian rainforest,<sup>81</sup> with a further 5 million hectares of logging concessions planned for 2016,<sup>82</sup> despite a recent independent analysis of Peru's logging sector which found that almost 70% of logging concessions inspected by the government between 2005 and 2012 were suspected of major violations of the law,<sup>83</sup> contributing substantially to forest degradation. Deforestation and land-use change, overexploitation of timber and legal and illegal gold mining are the top three threats to forests and biodiversity in Peru.<sup>84</sup> In addition, a series of regressive laws have been approved, aimed at expediting environmental licensing for extractive industry activities located



**Above:** Forests are crucial to mitigate climate change.

*There are over 20 million hectares of oil, infrastructure, mining and logging concessions assigned to the lowland Amazonian rainforest, with a further 5 million hectares of logging concessions planned for 2016.*

in the Amazon forest, and weakening the role of the Environment Ministry,<sup>85</sup> making a mockery of Peru's forest conservation commitments.

Promoting indigenous land tenure offers one route, among others, to secure these obligations and to re-direct Peru into a path of sustainable development in line with its forest conservation climate change obligations. But indigenous land tenure processes are mired in bureaucracy and slowed down by state inactivity. It is imperative therefore, that the Peruvian Government, and its international REDD partners, simplify this process, expedite pending indigenous land title applications and increase the current limited scope of titling

indigenous and native community lands to encompass the full 20 million ha demanded, as a means of guaranteeing that 75% of Peru's forests are indeed free of net deforestation by 2020. The time is now.

## ENDNOTES

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## **SPECIAL MESSAGE FROM THE ALEXANDER SOROS FOUNDATION**

The Alexander Soros Foundation Award is given to activists working at the nexus of environmental and human rights activism. Recipients of the award work tirelessly to secure our environment from harm and mitigate climate change.

It is important to honor these activists because many environmental defenders around the world are under threat, and fearlessly defend the lands they call home. In the case of the Saweto Community in the Amazon forests of Ucayali, Peru, the ASF Award was given in acknowledgement of the long struggle of the community against illegal logging, which saw four of their leaders murdered in September 2014.

The Award also sought to assist the community, in gaining the attention necessary to advocate for and eventually obtain the land rights to their home. Heroes like the community members of Saweto are the reason the award was created, and we hope that their victory in gaining the land title is only the beginning.

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Margoth Quispe

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