

Press Release

Mobility is critical for conservation!

A statement by the World Alliance of Mobile Indigenous Peoples (WAMIP)

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia 11 February 2004

The Global Biodiversity Forum held on 6-8 February 2004 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in preparation for the meeting of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP 7) highlighted some crucial understandings for conservation deeply connected with the traditional knowledge of mobile indigenous peoples.

The Forum stressed that planning and managing for entire seascapes and landscapes—rather than focusing on protected areas only – allows to better ensure biological connectivity in the landscape. This is part of the so-called “ecosystem approach”, officially adopted by the Convention. This is also part of the worldview of mobile indigenous peoples, for whom the landscape as a whole is, and has always been, the environment of life, work, economy and worship. As a matter of fact, mobile indigenous peoples do not simply “exist” in the landscape but they “shape” it by moving into it with their herds and families. By so doing, they create and maintain habitat pathways for specific wildlife communities and often also restore and enhance biodiversity through their presence and specific activities. They also enhance the transfer of seeds and insects. These pathways that have always existed and crisscross the landscape are called today “biological corridors” and are highlighted by experts as essential for conservation! In fact, they are bio-cultural corridors, where people manage to weave socio-economic exchanges, cultural practices and the understandings of life.

Mobility is a flexible and adaptive strategy to exist in the environment, maximizing the sustainable use of natural resources and minimizing any negative impact. This involves movements across different ecological zones and habitats and sometimes trans-boundary movement. Mobility is good in any ecosystem, but this is particularly true in drylands, where a mobile lifestyle is the only viable livelihood strategy. Complex management systems-- evolved through thousands of years of living with the resources—

taught mobile indigenous peoples when to stay and when to go, where to take their herds, where to go fishing in what time of the year, how to exchange with one another the pasture seeds and the fishing tools, how to understand when a drought is coming and anticipate for it or how to share food and knowledge.

On the basis of this, we, the World Alliance of Mobile Indigenous Peoples (WAMIP) stress the rights and capacity of mobile indigenous peoples to manage our living landscapes and seascapes and our right not to be subjected to conservation regimes concocted by others, such as government officials or conservation experts. We, the mobile indigenous peoples have our own institutions, leadership, decision-making mechanisms, sanctions and laws and have proven to be careful managers in some of the world's most difficult environmental conditions.

Despite of this, our rights have been abused in many countries. This includes the violation of our cultural rights, the violation of our right to maintain control and access to the natural resources, and especially our right to mobility as a livelihood strategy. Policies of sedentarisation have negatively affected our cultural identity and negated our capacity to manage the resources properly. Policies of sedentarisation lead to environmental deprivation and poverty for our peoples.

We, the mobile indigenous peoples demand that if the landscapes and seascapes in which we live are to be considered under a protection regime, this is done only with our free, prior and informed consent and as Community Conserved Areas. Regarding our land and resources already incorporated in protected areas, we demand the right of access to the natural resources within the protected area borders, based on customary practises and in compatibility with conservation of biodiversity. This especially implies temporary access or right of transit in time of acute environmental crisis.