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To Whom It May Concern:

The State Forest Agency “Metsähallitus” About to Seize Total Control of Sámi Indigenous Key Old Growth Forests For Economic Uses If New Law Passes in Finland: Moratorium Is Needed At Once

An unprecedented land grab threatens the last old growth forests of Finnish Lapland and the Sámi home area if the new Forestry Act legislation passes in the Finnish Parliament next week. Both Indigenous Sámi leaders and Arctic scientists are concerned about the proposed new reforms. All of the Sámi reindeer herding cooperatives oppose this law. 130,000 people have petitioned the parliament to stop this Forestry Act in its current form.

This crisis happens in a context where the previous government failed to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Now the current government in Finland is moving fast to completely wreck the existing rights of the only Indigenous people of EU. Sámi areas, including large tracts of north boreal old growth forests will be opened to a range of economic uses. Territory being affected includes hundreds of thousands of hectares of the Sub-Arctic and North Boreal areas of Finland. It constitutes the last preserved wilderness of Europe. Future new threats include for example construction of railroads and other large-scale infrastructure projects in addition to forestry impacts.

The new imminent Forestry Act no longer requires Metsähallitus, the state-run enterprise which controls these areas, to clarify to the Sámi Parliament and the Skolt Sámi Village Council what impact the land management shakeup would have on indigenous people's lives. Preparation of this Act has not reflected *Free, Prior and Informed Consent - FPIC*.

There is an urgent need to ensure that Metsähallitus does not undermine present or future opportunities to practice and foster Sámi culture. The new Act needs to include clauses that provide a protective zone and mechanisms to the Sámi. These are missing from the existing legal proposal. In Sámi home area 90 percent of the land is owned by the state via Metsähallitus.

President of the Finnish Section of the Saami Council¹, **Jouni Lukkari** says that: *“Sámi reindeer herding and the Sámi way of life are in danger of disappearing if the new Forestry Act legislation passes in the Finnish Parliament. In this case we will have few opportunities to influence the decision making over our lands. Rather, our territories will be controlled by market economy values.”*

¹ <http://www.saamicouncil.net/en/organization/>

Tero Mustonen, scientist from the Snowchange Cooperative², and one of the Lead Authors of the governmental **Arctic Biodiversity Assessment (ABA) of the Arctic Council**, quotes the report on Indigenous knowledge: *“Arctic peoples have thrived in a harsh environment for millennia, in no small part because they have acquired a great depth of knowledge about the land and waters of their homelands and the species that live there, which provide food, clothing and meaning to Arctic cultures. This traditional ecological knowledge is increasingly recognized as an important source of information for, among other things, understanding Arctic biodiversity and developing effective strategies to conserve that biodiversity, including indigenous ways of life.”*

Furthermore, Mustonen says that: *“In this period of rapid climate change in the Arctic it is imperative that these northern ecosystems are preserved intact – they are central to the Indigenous peoples’ survival and a source of their knowledge in this new reality. Forestry Act in its current form would cause severe, negative impacts to the Sámi society as we know it.”*

Therefore there is an urgent need to stop the current form of Forestry Act from proceeding further. However, should the Act to proceed in the Finnish Parliament next week, **the Sámi demand a full moratorium** on all state forestry and infrastructure actions inside the Sámi Home Area until such a time that the Indigenous rights of the area can be jointly agreed on. **A land use and occupancy mapping of the Sámi Land Use in accordance with international standards** should be enacted to document the historical and contemporary land and water rights of the Sámi.

For further information, please contact on the Sámi statements President of the Finnish Section of the Saami Council, **Jouni Lukkari** at jouni.lukkari@gmail.com and on the scientific implications of the Forestry Act in the Sámi Home Area **Ph D Tero Mustonen** at tero@snowchange.org



² www.snowchange.org