

*“Who will stop ‘this madness’ of climate change, if not us, then who,
if not now, then when?”*

Yeb Saño

All quotes are from indigenous peoples featured in the 'If Not Us Then Who' series of short films funded by the Ford Foundation & Climate & Land Use Alliance. To get involved and for the latest information please visit - www.ifnotusthenwho.me | @ifnotus_thenwho

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If Not Us Then Who?

Forests cover almost a third of the earth's landed surface and play a major role in stemming the effects of our rapidly changing climate. Within these forests live traditional and indigenous peoples who have a deep spiritual connection and understanding of their ancestral homes. This connection is being threatened by a resource hungry modern world. As a result, the people who call the forest their home, are now engaged in a constant and frequently violent struggle.

'If Not Us Then Who' communicates firsthand the unique personal stories of an inconspicuous yet vital people, as they battle to protect their lives, their cultures and our forests.

“The way I see it, the forests are like my hair, the water is like my blood, the sand and everything that God created on this earth. It’s like a human being. The same as me.”



Forest, Malinau, Borneo, Indonesia

“We are a seed that was born here and we grew up here. It is like a plant that you see growing, it is original and it belongs only here.”

Justa Romero Morales, Talamance, Costa Rica



At the riverside, Awas Tingni, Nicaragua

“We must reaffirm what we have for future generations to continue to preserve our identity, our way of life and the forests.”

O'po Jaime Corisepa, Madre de Dios, Peru



Carrying grain, Awas Tingni, Nicaragua

“In our terminology we call it ‘Tanah Ulen’ the indigenous forest conservation area. It is proof that indigenous peoples have the ability, wisdom and experience to manage forests.”

Martin Labo, Head of Malinau District Legislature & Indigenous Peoples Forum, Indonesia



Scarlet Macaw Protection Project, Mabita, Honduras

“About eight kilometres from here the settlers, the land grabbers, have destroyed the forest. We have been chased and shot at by these settlers... that is the threat we live under but we will always stand firm and with the power of god, maybe we can stay alive.”

Santiago Lacuth, Moskitia, Honduras



Santiago Lacuth, Scarlet Macaw Protection Project, Mabita, Honduras

“If our men fight for our forests they’ll be arrested by the police. So the women are also willing to get arrested and fight for the sake of our benzoin forests.”

Marga Rusmedia Lumban Gaol - Pandumaan & Sipituhuta, Indonesia



Husband and wife, forest riverside, Malinau, Borneo, Indonesia

“We are threatened but we welcome death. Why? For the defence of our nature, our life and our children’s future.”

Murdered indigenous leader, Edwin Chota, Peru



Recalina Devis Rufus, widow of Charley Taylor who was murdered defending his indigenous territory, Recalina has been left alone to raise their three children, Musawas, Bosawas Biosphere Reserve, Nicaragua

“Sometimes I cry. But the dreams that they had will come to pass, because, as my mother’s daughter, I will not let their deaths be the end. We will continue until god takes us.”

Diana Rios Rengifo, daughter of murdered Indigenous leader Jorge Rios, Peru



Walking the path, Musawas, Bosawas Biosphere Reserve, Nicaragua

“We do not fight alone, we also have friends, we have brothers who are struggling in other countries, and we struggle as one.”

Abdon Nababan, Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara (AMAN)



Brothers, Pandumaan & Sipituhuta, Indonesia

*“The nut breakers are warriors, they are warriors because they fight
and have the courage to say things.”*

Maria Do Socorro Teheira Lima, Babassu Lady, Brazil



Maria do Socorro, Babassu woman, MIQCB member, Tocantins State, Brazil

“Nothing will stop us until we reach our goal, which is the restoration, conservation and the regeneration of all areas being deforested. That is our purpose and the struggle continues.”

Jose Nelson, Awas Tingni, Nicaragua



Destruction of traditional lands, Pandumaan & Sipituhuta, Indonesia

*“The true meaning of freedom is titled land.
Titled land, freedom won.”*

Benedito Alves Da Silva, Eldorado, Quilombola community, Brazil



Rainforest, Trombetos river, Brazil

“I wish people would get it into their heads that money is merely a supplement to survive and that the world must be looked after and respected. As they say, you must put your feet on the ground and start reducing what we ourselves have increased.”

Junta Romero Morales, Costa Rica



Survivor of super typhoon Haiyan, Tacloban City, Philippines

“Humanity is in a dilemma; generating economic wealth at the expense of nature, aware we are killing our future survival.”

Levi Sucre, Talamanca, Costa Rica



Shading from the midday sun, survivor of super typhoon Haiyan, Tacloban City, Philippines

“We can no longer predict this weather, it is not the same as previous years. If the weather continues like this there could be famine.”

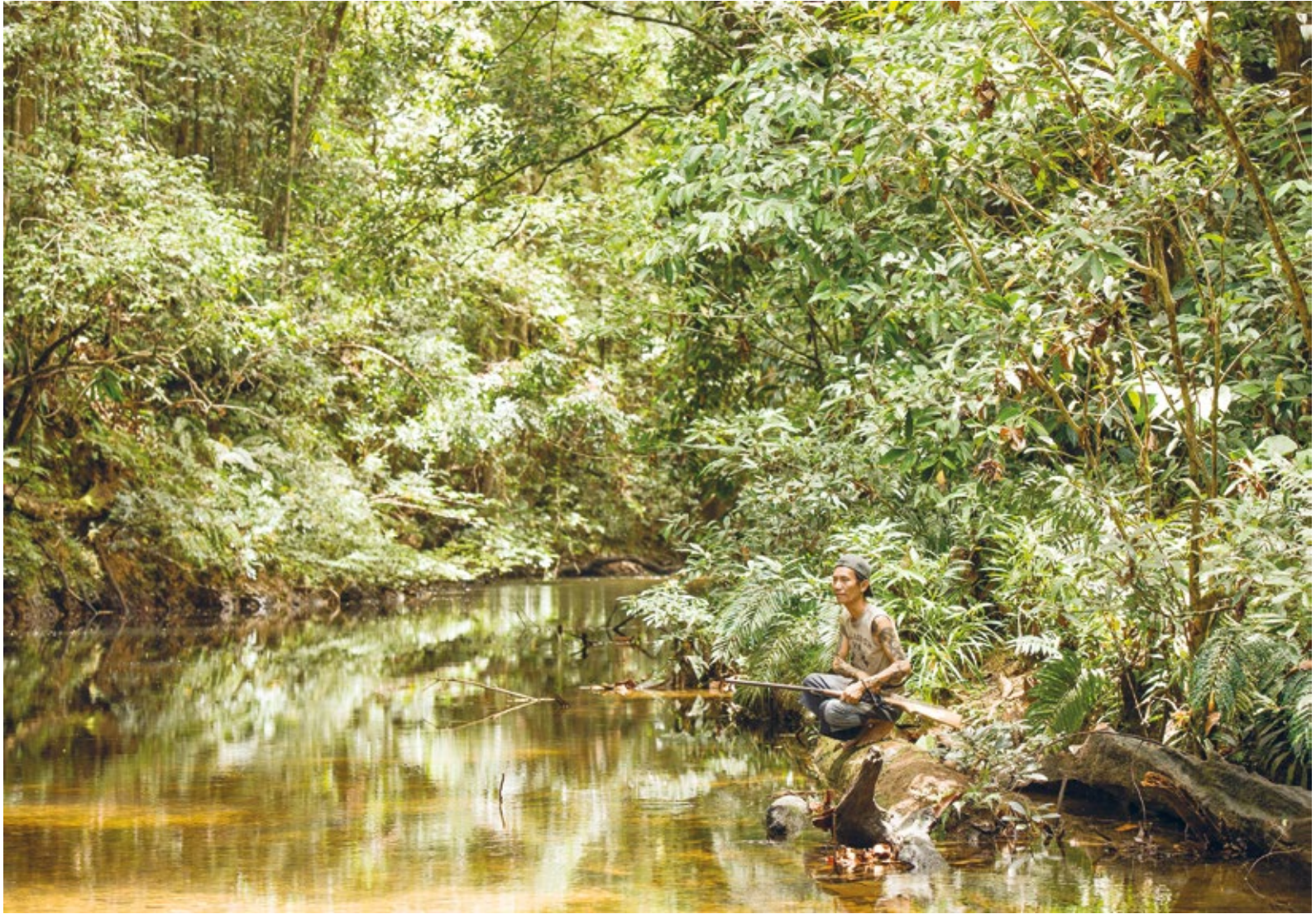
Kristiana Banang, Sungai Utik, Indonesia



Preparing rice for storage, Sungai Utik, Borneo, Indonesia

“Pana-pana in ancient times meant everything was harmonious. If something bad happened to a family then it became everyone’s problem. I think if you were to turn back time and have people live within the pana-pana system again, everything would be different.”

Bans Lopez, La Moskitia, Honduras



Raymondus Remang, Sungai Utik community leader, Borneo, Indonesia

“The government will be wise in viewing forests not only as a commodity but rather to see forests like the Mentawai communities, as an intrinsic part of their lives.”

Gugun Sanenek, Yayasan Citra Mandiri Mentawai (YCM), Mentawai, Indonesia



Shaman, Mentawai Islands, Indonesia

“Do not fall, arise!”

Maria de Jesus Ferreira Bringelo, Babassu Lady, Brazil



Babassu woman, Maranhao State, Brazil

Four Indigenous Demands

If the world is serious about slowing climate change they need to support a solution that already exists

To support indigenous communities 4 demands need to be met:

Land Titles

Communities need ownership over their ancestral land in order to protect forests. With no formal land title traditional communities often face serious conflict when trying to evict illegal loggers, poachers and land grabbers. Who will believe their claims without precise maps and legal title deeds?

There is now clear and undeniable evidence that where indigenous people have strong rights, there are standing forests.

Only 0.6% of forest was lost inside Indigenous lands in the Brazilian Amazon between 2000 and 2012, compared with 7.0% of forest outside such lands.^[1]

Consent

When decisions are made about their forests and ancestral lands communities have the right to free, prior, and informed consent. They should also be allowed to say no when governments and corporations threaten their livelihoods.

Indigenous peoples are the best guardians of the forest, but they are under siege from a great and growing hunger for new sources of food, fuel, mineral wealth and water.

Zero Violence

The battle to keep forests often leads to serious and sometimes fatal conflicts. Communities should be supported in their work and community leaders should not be criminalized for defending their land and our forests.

There were 46 indigenous people known to be killed in 2014 for taking a stand against environmental destruction. It is likely that the death toll is higher as murders often occur in remote villages or deep in jungles, where they are unreported.^[2]

Funding

Investment and direct access to finance for communities is vital to ensure good education, healthcare and rural development. If communities are to look after our forests then we should compensate them.

Investing in indigenous peoples not only conserves forests, it encourages sustainable development.

Indigenous groups

International NGOs and Donors

References:

[1] Stevens et al. (2014) Securing rights, combating climate change: how strengthening community forest rights mitigates climate change. Washington, DC: World Resources Institute. Accessible at www.wri.org/securing-rights

[2] How Many more, 2014's deadly environment: the killing and intimidation of environmental and land activists, with a spotlight on Honduras. Global Witness Report, April 20th 2015,
<https://www.globalwitness.org/campaigns/environmental-activists/how-many-more/>

