

Issyk Kul Declaration

“Securing Commons Land Use Rights Towards Improved Livelihoods of Local Communities in Asia”

1. We, the representatives of 45 grassroots organizations, peoples’ movements and CSOs from Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia, Nepal, Philippines and Thailand, gathered in Issyk Kul, on 12-15 September 2017, during the Asia Land Forum convened by, the Kyrgyz Association of Forest and Land Users (KAFLU) and Asia Regional Assembly by the International Land Coalition (ILC) Asia. With the theme: “People-Centered Land Governance, Securing Commons Land Use Rights Towards Improved Livelihoods of Local Communities in Asia”, the forum reviewed the agricultural lands, pasture, and forest governance in the context of Central Asia and across the region.
2. Marked by sustained and remarkable GDP growth over the last decades, the Asia Region has generally been associated with a steep decline in poverty and malnourishment. Despite these gains, poverty and exclusion still persist and have kept its rural face. Increasing landlessness remains a feature of the continent with landed interests firmly entrenched in power in some countries and states. Rural youth continue to seek economic opportunities elsewhere, putting at risk the sustainability of rural development and the struggle for land rights. Commons remain under threat of progressive privatization across the continent with Indigenous Peoples and communities confronted with increasingly conflictive environment.
3. We appreciate that the region has given higher recognition to the central role of pastures and started to pay further attention to the environmental protection of rangeland landscapes and herders’ livelihoods. In Central Asia pastoral agriculture is a way of life for many communities. Many policy reforms have been made in the pasture land sector in recent years that now need to be followed by major efforts to build capacities of users and secure their rights. Transition to a market economy for many countries in Central Asia region have come with the challenge of adopting different systems of pastoral property rights coupled with steady expansion of mining business that brought positive effects in terms of aggregated economic growth, though with huge, often negative, impact for the pasture land use rights.
4. Unequal land distribution, environmental degradation and competition for land resources are making it critical to establish sustainable, equitable and just land governance frameworks for the sake of political and social stability. Many of the resource-poor farmers remain isolated and unorganized, detached from centers of power and government. Gender imbalances in land ownership exist, as traditional and customary practices preventing women from gaining access to land and resources prevail. Younger generations of small scale producers, agricultural workers, indigenous peoples and landless rural and urban poor are diminishing their sense of belonging to their local natural richness due to the aforementioned causes.
5. Acknowledging that the lack of land and water resources, desertification are becoming critical factors that hamper economic, social and ecological development of countries in Central Asia and that rational use of land resources is the priority at regional and national levels
6. The Land Forum affirms the role of rural youth in sustainable and inclusive rural development, especially in the struggle for land rights.
7. The land forum welcomed and supported the concerns and recommended actions of the Tirana declaration of 2011 on securing land access for the poor in times of intensified

natural resource competition, which calls states to place small scale producers, agricultural workers, indigenous peoples and landless rural and urban poor at the centre of efforts to overcome structural food and environmental crisis, control their own food system, and recognizes the rights of local communities to use, to manage, and control land and other natural resources as a basic for community driven development.

8. We recall the message of Quezon declaration 2016: “Realizing the Sustainable Development Goals: Defending Land Rights of Communities to Achieve Food Sovereignty in the Region,” the forum presented and discussed food security priorities of international organizations and selected Asian countries and sustainable development goals in the context of hunger and land rights. The CSO participants believes that food insecurity stems primarily from unequal distribution of resources and the inequitable access to productive assets, prejudicing the rural poor. In most cases, the national economic development agendas set by national governments promote grants of land concessions, expansion of plantations, mining operations, joint venture agreements, corporate farming, and the establishment of special economic zones – all of which require that land be distributed to the landless poor. We reaffirm the Dakar Declaration 2015 that this is the time of action for inclusive, just, and sustainable land governance.
9. We recognise those challenges are further exacerbated by the increasing of land grabbing in Asia in the last decades, weak policy framework, dislocation of indigenous peoples, militarization and lack of transparency and access to information which led to the increasing of land conflicts and human rights violations.
10. As expressed by the Regional Land Forum, land privatization has adversely affected the more marginalized and forest dependent sub group, most of whom are women and who depend heavily on communal land for grazing livestock, collection of firewood and non-timber forest products. At the same time, grassland are over grazed and becoming desertified as a result a growing herd size, severe climatic condition, intensified, agricultural practices, poor management and impact on political economy.
11. We note from the Regional Land Forum, in the Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia context, the current capacity of national and local governments need to be strengthened in relation to pastureland and forest land management, particularly in providing policy guidance and building the capacity of resources users, whilst also providing further assistance in financing where needed. Challenge remain in enabling the roles of local land users in territorial and ecosystem management.

In reflection of the aforementioned situations, we call on:

1. The governments of Asia region to respect and uphold the rights to the agricultural land, pasture and forest of local communities, especially women and indigenous peoples in accordance with article 26 of the UNDRIP, by noting gender situations as well as intergenerational issues. We urge the states authorities to strengthen national legal systems to effectively respect and recognize the various and diverse tenure system on land governance in order to promote the people centered policies and programs
2. Agribusiness companies, banks, and investors in Asia to respect the rights of local communities to land and natural resources by strictly observing the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure (VGGT).
3. The need of small farmers on agrarian reform agenda to hinder the inequalities of ownership and access to land and the concentration of land ownership.

4. The governments, governing related agencies in Asia region, research institutes, and customary leaders to recognise the essential role of pastoralists in global environmental sustainability, biodiversity, and mitigation of the climate change.
5. The governments to recognize locally manage ecosystem and forest that has been proven securing the commons, and led in to the ecosystem sustainability.

The Bishkek regional land forum is acknowledged as the milestone to the Bandung Global Land Forum, therefore, we would like to invite your participation in the upcoming forum convened in Bandung, Indonesia, 24-29 September 2018, in order to measure and foresee the global achievement and direction of people centered land governance.

We extend our appreciation to the ILC member; KAFLU, RDF, UWUA and Kyrgyz jaiyty of Kyrgyzstan, for their hospitality and commitment in hosting the Asia Land Forum and Regional Assembly.

Adopted by acclamation on September 14, 2017 by the following organizations:

ANGOC, ABHIYAN Nepal, AIPP, ALRD, AFA, ARBAN, AR NOW!, BJSa, CARRD, CDA, CDS, COLARP, CSRC, EP, FES, FNN, IESD, JKS, KAFLU, JASIL, JKPP, KF, KPA, MARAG, MLMA, MODE-Nepal, NLRf, NGO Forum, PAFID, PRAYATNA Samiti, PAKISAMA, PWESCR, RDF, RMI, SAINS, SARRA, SCOPE, SDDPA, SDF, SK, SWADHINA, TFM, UWUA, VSK, XSF