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Press Release

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Stopping human rights abuses is key to solving forest crisis

A new report published today (28-12-01) clearly links the disappearance of the world's forests with the horrifying catalogue of human rights abuses taking place as a result of conflicts between forest peoples and the powerful government and corporate interests within forests. Published by Fern, *Forests of Fear: the abuse of human rights in forest conflicts* calls for governments, environmental groups and aid donors to prioritise the defence of human rights as the primary solution to solving the forest crisis.

Forests of Fear highlights the stories of over 40 cases of human rights abuse, arising from such conflicts. Four detailed case studies, three country analyses (Indonesia, Mexico and Canada), as well as further examples offer evidence of human rights abuses including murder, threat to life, disregard of land rights, illegal imprisonment, forced resignation and torture. The examples include:

Three children – Kenowuia Nury Bokota, Mauricio Diaz and Jorge Anikuta – from Colombia's indigenous U'wa population died during police action to evict some 450 people from a road blockade using tear gas, riot sticks and bulldozers. The U'wa have been mounting a massive struggle against oil exploitation by US corporation Occidental Petroleum in forest they claim to be their ancestral territory.

A US Forest Service ranger, Buzz Williams, was accused of insubordination after criticising environmentally damaging timber sales in the Chattooga River corridor. He eventually lost his job. Williams' superior, Tina Barnes, was intimidated, sexually harassed, demoted and forced to resign when she supported him in his views.

“Without halting these abuses and creating a climate in which the fate of forests can be discussed in an open manner with all involved, there is little hope that the ongoing destruction of world’s forests can be stopped.” said Saskia Ozinga, Fern’s Director who commissioned the report.

Forests of Fear concludes with seven key recommendations, including:

- defence of human rights must be made a priority in environmental campaigns
- international database of corporations with a record of human rights abuses should be established
- documentation of human rights abuses relating to forest conflicts should be formally recognised
- the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders should be widely adopted and enforced by governments.

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Notes for Editors

1. Fern campaigns for the sustainable use of the world’s forests and respect for forest peoples’ rights. Fern aims to change the policies and practices of the European Union in areas such as forest certification, climate change, aid and trade.