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## **International Coalition Launches Unprecedented Effort to Strengthen Local Rights to Own and Use Forests and Fight Rural Poverty**

*Group Sees Historic Opportunity to Boost Incomes Among 1.6 Billion Forest-Dependent Poor, Prevent Illegal Logging and Protect Forest Biodiversity*

BANGKOK, THAILAND (4 May 2006)—Stating that the ambitious global effort to radically reduce poverty will fail unless it focuses on the 1.6 billion people who rely on forests for their livelihoods, a coalition of organizations has launched an international initiative advocating for stronger community rights to own and use forests and develop sustainable forest-based economies. The group aims to assist communities and governments to double the global forest area under community ownership and management by 2015.

Many people who live in forested regions, which cover 30 percent of the world's land mass, eke out \$2 a day or less, and that includes some 350 million indigenous and tribal people who depend on forests for food, housing, heat, and medicine. The initiative also seeks to reduce by half the proportion of people in forest areas who live in extreme poverty by 2015. This can only be done, the group argues, if these communities have clear rights to own and use forest resources.

The partners agree that it would be impossible for the world to reach the Millennium Development Goals on poverty and environmental protection without addressing the rights and improving the economic status of the 1.6 billion people—nearly one third of the planet's population—who depend on forests for their survival.

Founding partners of the Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI) include the Indonesia-based Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), the Coordinating Association of Indigenous and Community Agroforestry in Central America (ACICAFOC), Washington, DC-based Forest Trends, the Bangkok-based Regional Community Forestry Training Center for Asia and the Pacific (RECOFTC), the Foundation for People and Community Development, Papua New Guinea, and the World Conservation Union (IUCN).

“Most of the world's tropical forests are government-owned and managed, despite legitimate local claims to the forest and the limited ability of governments to protect these





