

Governor Dr. Zaini Abdullah
Jl. Tgk. Cot Plieng
No. 48 Lampiang
Aceh, Sumatra
Indonesia

29 November 2013

Honorable Governor,

On behalf of the Great Apes Survival Partnership (GRASP) and its 90 partner nations, conservation organizations, United Nations agencies, and research institutions, we are writing to congratulate you on the special International Union for Conservation of Nature recognition that Leuser Ecosystem (KEL) has received earlier this month.

We would like to build on this international recognition by suggesting that you consider nominating the KEL to become a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) UNESCO World Heritage Site.

GRASP, which counts both UNESCO and the World Heritage Convention among its partners, would like to draw your attention to the article published on 15 November 2013 in the international journal *Science* in which KEL was identified as one of the world's foremost "irreplaceable areas" (Le Saout et al., 2013, p. 803). Interestingly, while only one of 10 criteria is required for nomination, KEL qualifies for World Heritage Status on at least three criteria.

KEL has long been recognized as an irreplaceable ecosystem to the people of Aceh, providing approximately four million people with clean water for downstream irrigation, agriculture and food production. We are aware that KEL provides further environmental services to communities through mitigation of soil erosion, flooding, landslides and pest outbreaks. Nationally and internationally, KEL plays a critical role in climate regulation and carbon storage. Aceh is rightly proud of these ecological services that have been valued at more than 400 million USD per year. The tough stance taken on criminal activities in Leuser (Act No.26/2007) to protect this globally significant area is highly respected in the international community.

As a World Heritage Site, KEL would remain part of the legal territory of Aceh but UNESCO considers it in the interests of the international community to preserve each site. Therefore, World Heritage status would give KEL special recognition and further support from the international community. Economic analyses, such as those led by the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) (Wich et al. 2011) show that financial revenues are often higher when forests are conserved and payments for ecosystem services (PES) are adopted to generate long-term income. Countries such as Costa Rica and Brazil have used such an approach and have boosted solid economic growth, while at the same time maintaining and even extending forest cover. Aceh has the potential to do the same, and become a shining example of how economic growth and proactive conservation can go hand in hand.

As you may be aware, the richness of KEL's biodiversity is in its lowland forests (which include critically endangered orangutans, elephants, tigers and many other important species), without which the Leuser Ecosystem would cease to function. Although part of KEL was included in a World Heritage Cluster Site along with Kerinci Seblat and Bukit Barisan Selatan National Parks, the lowland forests were largely excluded. GRASP believes that the Leuser Ecosystem as a whole deserves recognition to stand alone as a World Heritage Site, and with Aceh's newly won autonomy, this might now be possible. We urge you both as the Governor of this beautiful area and as a man dedicated to the welfare of your people to proceed in nominating KEL to receive the global recognition it deserves.

Yours sincerely,



Doug Cress
Programme Coordinator
GRASP



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Chair
GRASP Scientific Commission

cc: Pres. Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono
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