Title: Taking down the wall-- Indigenous Peoples, conservation and SDGs

To achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of ending poverty, advancing gender equality, confronting climate change, reducing conflict globally, and conserving forests and ecosystems, more concerted action is needed to tackle a major root cause. Securing community rights to the lands and natural resources of Indigenous Peoples (IPs) is key to making progress on each Goal. Indigenous Peoples’ organizations have been critical of the SDGs for their lack of measurable progress indicators for IPs, particularly in regard to community land and natural resource rights. An enormous challenge IPs face is the continued lack of respect for IP rights in existing Protected Areas (PAs) as well as in expansion and creation of new PAs. Ironically, the same SDGs promote expansion of the global network of Protected areas to tackle biodiversity loss, ecosystem degradation and climate change, promoting a model that harmed IPs historically and now threatens their future.

Together with Rights and Resources Initiative, the UN Specialist Rapporteur on Indigenous Peoples has completed an in-depth analysis documenting the seriousness of the current situation as well as demonstrating that the current conservation model is both counter-productive to its own goals and misses an opportunity to strengthen IP conservation efforts – proven to be highly effective in many landscapes for conservation of high biodiversity and unique cultures. While there has been progress in rights-based conservation in some countries, the dominant pattern is overlap of IP community land rights and protected areas with chronic abuse and human rights violations. Further, globally funding for public protected areas has remained flat and inadequate for decades, bringing into question the strategy of creating yet new areas. We found that IPs are spending more in conservation of their own land and territories – annually $ 2-4 per hectare, sometimes more than that spent in their own country’s public protected areas. Progress in pursuit of SDGs could be accelerated by creating an independent conservation monitoring and grievance mechanism, committing to the UN Declaration on Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) for all conservation and REDD+ interventions, gaining redress thru truth and reconciliation, and further recognition of collective IP land and resource rights.