



Statement on the Declaration of the Pawklo Indigenous Stewardship Territory (PIST)

April 27, 2026

On April 22, 2026, during a historic gathering held from April 22 to 24, we the Indigenous Karen communities of the Pawklo River Basin, located in K'Ser Doh Township, Mergui-Tavoy District of Kawthoolei, formally and collectively declared the Pawklo Indigenous Stewardship Territory (PIST).

This declaration affirms our inherent right to **self-determination**, our responsibility to **care for our ancestral lands and waters**, and our shared commitment to **peace, justice, cultural survival, and environmental integrity**. PIST is a living Indigenous territory governed by the Indigenous people who have protected it for generations.

The Pawklo Indigenous Stewardship Territory encompasses **358,493 acres** (1,451 km²) of rivers, forests, mountains, farmlands, and sacred places. It is home to 24 villages and over 11,500 people whose lives, identities, and cultures are inseparable from the land. Through an inclusive and democratic process, **4,622 community members representing 88 percent of all eligible adults have endorsed the PIST Charter**. Developed through years of consultations, community deliberations, and participatory research and mapping, the **PIST Charter** establishes an inclusive system of governance rooted in Indigenous Karen worldviews while affirming gender equality, intergenerational responsibility, and meaningful community participation in decisions affecting our territory.

We declare the PIST in response to decades of dispossession, militarization, and unconsented development, particularly the harmful projects that intensified after the 2015 Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement. Roads, mining, and extractive activities have threatened our rivers, forests, livelihoods, and sacred places. Rather than allowing our ancestral territory to be taken or destroyed, we have chosen to govern and protect it ourselves according to our customary laws, Indigenous knowledge, and shared values.

The PIST is not only a declaration on paper, it is already a living reality. Our communities are actively protecting and managing **11 community forests and 15 fish conservation zones**, safeguarding sacred forests and rivers, practicing rotational agriculture, and sustaining Indigenous agro-ecological livelihoods. These efforts demonstrate our Indigenous stewardship, which is essential for biodiversity protection, climate resilience, and the well-being of present and future generations.

As P'doh Saw Eh Na, Mergui-Tavoy District Secretary has stated:

“Our people are inseparable from the forest, just as wildlife is inseparable from forests. Wildlife must move from forest to forest to find food and mates to sustain and increase their populations. Likewise, we, the Karen people, must not be divided but live together in unity and remain connected to nature. We must coexist with forests and nature. Therefore, we warmly welcome and support the declaration of the Pawklo Indigenous Stewardship Territory as a component that fulfills and strengthens the long-standing vision and efforts of the Mergui-Tavoy District Karen National Union to establish the broader K'Ser Doh Conservation Areas (KCAs) in this district.”

In conclusion, today we declare the **Pawklo Indigenous Stewardship Territory** as a place of **life, care, dignity, and responsibility**, entrusted to us by our ancestors and protected for generations yet to come.

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