mailto: esa.harmala at metsa.fi

December 9, 2014

To : Mr. Esa Härmälä, General Director, Metsähallitus

I join with a growing international network of governmental agencies, scientists, Indigenous and local communities and their organisations, led by the Snowchange Cooperative ([www.snowchange.org](http://www.snowchange.org)) to voice all our grave concerns regarding the status of the last boreal forests on the lot “Ostola” of Kontiolahti, North Karelia, Finland by your state enterprise **Metsähallitus.**

Metsähallitus State Enterprise in Finland has been in breach of its PEFC Certificate for decades in Karelia. The company is logging old growth and natural forests despite local opposition.

For example; already in 1990s it planned to clear-fell old-growth forests in the area of Raesärkkä, Nurmes, in North Karelia. Since then Metsähallitus has clear-cut several old growth sites despite local opposition. This November clear-cuts proceeded on in the culturally relevant Viena Karelia area[[1]](#footnote-1). These actions are in direct violation of its PEFC Certification, which explicitly states that it:

*- Is tailored to the specific needs of family– and community-owned forests, with lasting contributions to livelihoods and rural development*

*- Sets the highest standards for forest certification aligned with the majority of the world’s governments, including…. Recognizing the principle of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC)*

In Kontiolahti, North Karelia, Metsähallitus has placed an old-growth forest under economic forestry, after clear-cutting on the lot in 2009-2011. The forest is under threat, even though Metsähallitus has come out with a statement otherwise[[2]](#footnote-2).

The lot can be sold and/or cut immediately when local and international attention eases on the situation. Only direct opposition to the forestry plans has forced the company prevent logging in the last old growth parts of the forests and to issue a formal statement on their intentions.

Ostola Forest, the last of the state unprotected boreal forests in the Finnish-Karelian homeland area of Kontiolahti, is targeted for total destruction by Finnish State Logging Company Metsähallitus. Since Metsähallitus has been clear-cutting many old-growth forests in villages of Karelia across Finland despite local opposition, it is greatly feared that Ostola Forest will join all the other boreal forest landscapes that have been, and are actively being, annihilated.

This forest has become internationally known for its community relevance and biodiversity, being home to large boreal mammals such as the European Brown Bear, Wolverine, Lynx, visiting Boreal Wolf and EU Directive –relevant bird species, including several Owl species, the Greenish Warbler, Capercaillie and Forest Grouse. It is the last of the unprotected boreal forests in the area.

Ostola forest is trying to become a member of the international, UN-recognized network of Indigenous and Local Community Conserved Areas. During the World Parks Congress held recently in Australia, the Head of the Conservation of Biological Conservation and Global Environmental Facility of the United Nations listened with surprise and concern to the urgency of the situation of the Ostola forest and the planned Metsähallitusclear-cuts.

An international outcry has arisen over Metsähallitus’ plans, but the company remains poised to move on its plans to sell or clear-cut in the very near future unless a moratorium is put into effect as soon as possible.

Given that so little of the boreal old growth and community-relevant forests remain in Finland, we urge you to:

1. *Immediately stop all plans of economic forestry and clear cuts in the Ostola lot and install a full moratorium on this lot indefinitely.*
2. *Start direct negotiations with the representatives of the Snowchange Cooperative to conserve this last piece of forest, while allowing community-relevant uses, such as hunting, berry picking, cultural and traditional uses of the forest. More specifically we demand that you conserve legally the 6,6 hectares of intact Ostola old growth and create a minimum of 50 hectares transition zone around the core of the old growth for the forest to recover over time.*
3. *Decide to protect this forest immediately after these negotiations have been concluded.*

**We will continue to mount pressure on Metsähallitus enterprise and expand this letter campaign in solidarity with others around the world until such time the forest is saved.**

*Regards,*

1. <http://yle.fi/uutiset/yksityishenkilo_nokkapokassa_metsahallituksen_kanssa_lonnrotin_kulkemasta_polusta/7635861> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <http://www.metsa.fi/sivustot/metsa/en/WhatsNew/NewsReleases2014/Sivut/NoforestmanagementmeasuresinOstola.aspx> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)