February 18, 2002

Dear Friends,

I'm writing to share with you some of the victories that Indigenous peoples and their allies- such as the Rainforest Foundation – have experienced in the past year.

We are constantly bombarded with bad news coming from the Amazon: so many acres destroyed, another people faced with eviction from their lands, another leader murdered. In between the news bulletins and urgent action requests, however, there are also some important victories. These successes are the fruit of long years of hard work – organizing campaigns, legal battles, educational programs and projects for health and economic alternatives.

Much of these hard-won victories are the result of work being done by local organizations on the ground, but international support is critical. As a donor of the Rainforest Foundation, you've been a part of this process, and as we begin the New Year we thought we'd share some of the victories with you. The following are but just a few:

- The Panará of Brazil, whom the Rainforest Foundation has been supporting since they decided to return to their traditional land in 1996, won an important victory in 2001. In September, a Federal Court of Appeals ordered the Brazilian government to compensate the Panará for damages suffered because of the tragic consequences of their initial contact and subsequent removal from their traditional lands in the 1970's. In a country where dozens of Indigenous peoples have been violently affected by governmental policies, the decision is setting an historic precedent: it acknowledges the responsibility of the state with regard to its policy toward Indigenous peoples.

- The Mayagna community of Awas Tingni, in Nicaragua, won a precedent-setting victory through international courts. The Inter-American Court of Human Rights ruled that Nicaragua violated the human rights of the Awas Tingni community and ordered the government to recognize and protect the community's legal rights to its traditional lands, natural resources, and environment. This is the first such case to be heard by the Inter-American Court, although there are many similar disputes throughout Latin America. In its decision, the court stated that Nicaragua violated international human rights law by denying the community its rights to property, adequate judicial protection, and equal protection under the law. It ordered the government to demarcate the traditional lands of the

Awas Tingi community and to establish new legal mechanisms to demarcate the traditional lands of all indigenous communities in Nicaragua. The court also ordered compensation payments to the community. Our colleagues at the Indian Law Resource Center represented the community and took a leading role in assisting the Commission in bringing the case before the Court.

- Ashaninka communities in the Ene Valley of Peru gained land titles through a project supported by the Rainforest Foundation-UK and a local organization, the Asociación para la Conservación del Patrimonio del Cutiverini (ACPC). During the 1990's the Ashaninka were victims of the violent conflict between the Sendero Luminoso guerilla movement and the Peruvian government. Thousands of Ashaninka died or were forced to flee from their homes. In gaining their land titles, these communities, numbering some 3,000 people have found renewed security and independence. Their lands will eventually form an integral part of a zoned protected area covering about 500,000 hectares, almost twice the size of Rhode Island, which the Peruvian authorities have already agreed to.

2001 was a particularly fruitful year for the Indigenous rights movement. We hope that these victories mark a trend toward recognizing the rights of Indigenous peoples on the international and national levels. There is still much to do, however: international Indigenous rights instruments at the United Nations and Organization of American States have yet to be passed and national legislation needs to be strengthened and implemented. Perhaps most of all, the rights which exist on paper must be brought to life for Indigenous communities around the world.

Closer to home, we are proud to announce the appointment of Ana Valéria Araújo as our new Executive Director. Ana is an Indigenous rights lawyer from Brazil, and a founder of what has become one of our most important partner organizations, the Socioenvironmental Institute. Her experience will be a great asset to the Rainforest Foundation US, and will push forward our commitment to Indigenous rights and the environment. Under her dedicated leadership the Rainforest Foundation will continue to confront these important issues, and with your support and active participation we will achieve our goals.

In these times it is particularly important to recognize the role that international solidarity plays to improve the quality of life throughout the world.

Thank you for your continued support.

Sincerely,

Lisa Stamm
Development Director