



In Myanmar, a mother's best hopes for her daughters' educations and future are derailed when her husband dies and her access to the forest—and its products—is diminished.



In Thailand, a group of women in the Khao Rao Thian Thong Community Forestry Network make a living through sustainable practices and bamboo harvesting.

## Los Angeles-based **Venice Arts** and Bangkok-based **The Center for People and Forests** Release Short Film Series—**Voices of the Forests: Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand**

LOS ANGELES, CA – (MARCH 12, 2015)

Los Angeles-based Venice Arts, together with Bangkok-based The Center for People and Forests (RECOFTC), today released a series of three short (5-7 minute) films created collaboratively with RECOFTC staff and villagers living in forest communities in Pursat, Cambodia; Inle Lake, Myanmar (Burma); and Khao Rao Thian Thong, Thailand. The films have been released online in celebration of the International Day of Forests on March 21st. They will screen in Los Angeles in April.

These highly unique films are the outcome of a “participatory” process in which, under the training and direction of Venice Arts, RECOFTC staff and villagers worked together to identify and develop their stories. Beautiful and intimate, they show what happens when individual villagers courageously stand-up for their rights and their children’s futures, recognizing the importance of reversing years of environmental degradation, over-harvesting, and land grabbing to sustain their livelihoods, the quality of their lives, and the environment.

The first film to be released is from **Myanmar (Burma)**. It tells the story of a mother of two, who recently lost her husband. No longer able to gather resources from the forest by herself, she must ask her eldest daughter, only 13 years old, to leave school to help support the family by selling snacks to tourists. In the second film, from **Thailand**, a female member of a bamboo-shoot processing cooperative tells how they make their livelihood from forest products, while working to improve the area’s degraded forest and promote its long-term sustainability. The third film, from **Cambodia**, features the stories of two extraordinary and highly committed community leaders, both working without remuneration. One brings us on a night patrol that protects the forest from illegal logging. The other, the first female community forest chief in the area, shows us how important forest resources are—the wood, the leaves, the food—to her and her community.

According to Tint Lwin Thaug, RECOFTC’s Executive Director, “Many challenges in forest conservation have occurred because local people’s participation in management has been undermined. Good governance of forest resources relies on involving local communities, as their livelihoods depend largely on forest resources. These videos show the stories of three local communities—their aspirations and how they can contribute to sustainable forest management.”

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In Cambodia, volunteer community leaders protect the forest from illegal logging through night patrols and community activism.



Participatory training in the field.



"Voices of the Forest: Myanmar" being shared at a community screening in the village in which the film was made.

Reflecting on the participatory process, Venice Arts' Executive Director, Lynn Warshafsky says, "Participants developed their knowledge of documentary filmmaking and skills in using media tools. More importantly, they deepened their ability to listen for, visualize, and uplift stories of transformation; to understand that even small stories, told well, can serve as witness, facilitator, and change agent." The films will be used in local communities to foster dialogue, as well as nationally and internationally among forest decision-makers to bring community voices to the fore. They are available in English and Thai/Khmer/Myanmar-language and can be viewed on Venice Arts' and RECOFTC's websites. Venice Arts will host a special screening at its arts center at 1702 Lincoln Blvd., Venice, in April. For details, contact Elysa Voshell at [elysa@venicearts.org](mailto:elysa@venicearts.org).

### **About The Center for People and Forests (RECOFTC)**

RECOFTC's mission is to enhance capacities for stronger rights, improved governance and fairer benefits for local people in sustainable forested landscapes in the Asia and the Pacific region. RECOFTC has been the primary institution for promoting community forestry in Asia and the Pacific since its inception in 1987. By building the capacity of the various stakeholders – from communities to governments to non-governmental organizations and the private sector – RECOFTC has worked in partnership to improve the policies, institutions and practices of community forestry in the region.

[www.recoftc.org](http://www.recoftc.org)

### **About Venice Arts**

Now in its twenty-second year, Los Angeles-based Venice Arts is an award-winning, media-based arts organization. Venice Arts provides training and consultation to NGOs worldwide, working with both their staff and community members to create high impact photography, video, and multimedia stories for social good. Locally, Venice Arts offers an Art Mentoring & Education Program that provides high impact, media-based arts education to low-income children and teens; implements regional, statewide, and international Documentary Programs with both adults and children; and presents Gallery & Public Programs centered around documentary photography and film. It is the philosophy of Venice Arts that storytelling and creative self-expression have the potential to transform and empower people who are commonly marginalized—youth and adults— and to see greater possibilities for themselves and for their communities.

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**21 March  
International Day of Forests**