Goldman Environmental Prize Honors Six Heroes of the Environment
Award goes to activists from Tanzania, Cambodia, Slovakia, Peru, Puerto Rico, United States

SAN FRANCISCO, April 18, 2016 — The Goldman Environmental Foundation today announced the six recipients of the 2016 Goldman Environmental Prize, the world’s largest award for grassroots environmental activists. Awarded annually to environmental heroes from each of the world’s six inhabited continental regions, the Goldman Prize recognizes fearless grassroots activists for significant achievements in protecting the environment and their communities.

The winners will be awarded the Prize at an invitation-only ceremony today at 5:30 p.m. at the San Francisco Opera House (this event will be live streamed online at www.goldmanprize.org/ceremony). A ceremony at the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center in Washington, D.C. will follow on Wednesday, April 20 at 7:30 p.m.

This year’s winners are:

**EDWARD LOURE, Tanzania**
Edward Loure led a grassroots organization that pioneered an approach that gives land titles to indigenous communities—instead of individuals—in northern Tanzania, ensuring the environmental stewardship of more than 200,000 acres of land for future generations.

**LENG OUCH, Cambodia**
In one of the most dangerous countries in the world for environmental activists, Leng Ouch went undercover to document illegal logging in Cambodia and exposed the corruption robbing rural communities of their land, causing the government to cancel large land concessions.

**ZUZANA CAPUTOVA, Slovakia**
A public interest lawyer and mother of two, Zuzana Caputova spearheaded a successful campaign that shut down a toxic waste dump that was poisoning the land, air and water in her community, setting a precedent for public participation in post-communist Slovakia.

**LUIS JORGE RIVERA HERRERA, Puerto Rico**
Luis Jorge Rivera Herrera helped lead a successful campaign to establish a nature reserve in Puerto Rico’s Northeast Ecological Corridor—an important nesting ground for the endangered leatherback sea turtle—and protect the island’s natural heritage from harmful development.

**DESTINY WATFORD, United States**
In a community whose environmental rights had long been sidelined to make room for heavy industry, Destiny Watford inspired residents of a Baltimore neighborhood to defeat plans to build the nation’s largest incinerator less than a mile away from her high school.

**MÁXIMA ACUÑA, Peru**
A subsistence farmer in Peru’s northern highlands, Máxima Acuña stood up for her right to peacefully live off her own land, a property sought by Newmont and Buenaventura Mining to develop the Conga gold and copper mine.

**ATTENTION EDITORS:** Detailed biographical information, photographs, and broadcast-quality video of all the winners in their home countries are available by request or online at www.goldmanprize.org/pressroom

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2016 Goldman Environmental Prize Recipients

Africa
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Asia
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Europe
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Islands & Island Nations
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North America
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South & Central America
MÁXIMA ACUÑA, Peru
A subsistence farmer in Peru’s northern highlands, Máxima Acuña stood up for her right to peacefully live off her own land, a property sought by Newmont and Buena Ventura Mining to develop the Conga gold and copper mine.
A growing demand for limited rangeland
In the northern rangelands of Tanzania, communities of pastoralists and hunter-gatherers have sustainably lived off the land for generations, in coexistence with migrating native wildlife. Maasai communities move their herds according to the seasons, taking care not to overgraze the land and share resources with the wildebeest, gazelles, impalas, and other animals that keep the ecosystem in balance.

Starting in the 1950s, the establishment of national parks pushed out indigenous peoples from their traditional lands, causing them to become “conservation refugees.” In recent years, these conflicts have grown. Urban migrants encroach on rangelands traditionally managed by the Maasai, and the government sells land concessions to a burgeoning safari and hunting industry. These deals were often made in secrecy, without consulting the politically marginalized local people.

The increased competition over limited land has not only disrupted the balance of the ecosystem, but also physically displaced the indigenous peoples whose existence and livelihoods had played a key role in protecting the wildlife and environment. Meanwhile, the revenue created from the tourism industry rarely flows back to benefit the displaced communities.

Communal culture, communal land rights
Born to a Maasai tribe, Edward Loure grew up in the Simanjiro plains, where his family and others in the community led a peaceful seminomadic life raising their cattle in harmony with the surrounding wildlife. In 1970, the Tanzanian government sealed off part of their village land to create Tarangire National Park and forcefully evicted the Maasai residing within the park boundaries.

His personal experiences, cultural background, and education—with degrees in management and administration—put him in a unique position to lead the Ujamaa Community Resource Team (UCRT), a local organization that has championed community land rights and sustainable development in northern Tanzania for the past 20 years. Loure was one of the first people to join UCRT, and together with his colleagues—hunter-gatherers and fellow pastoralists—began driving efforts to protect his people and traditions.

Loure and the UCRT team found an opportunity in one particular aspect of Maasai governance: its strong communal culture. It became the basis for Certificates of Customary Right of Occupancy (CCRO), a creative approach to applying the Tanzanian Village Land Act. Instead of the conventional model of giving land titles to individuals, CCROs allow Edward Loure led a grassroots organization that pioneered an approach that gives land titles to indigenous communities—instead of individuals—in northern Tanzania, ensuring the environmental stewardship of more than 200,000 acres of land for future generations.
entire communities to secure indivisible rights over their customary lands and manage those territories through bylaws and management plans. By formalizing communities’ land holdings and providing legal documentation, CCROs would help them protect their land rights and ensure the environmental stewardship of their territory for future generations.

Improving economic realities, promoting wildlife conservation

In 2011, UCRT’s pioneering model began to take shape with the first CCROs issued to Hadzabe hunter-gatherers. Loure and UCRT staff traveled for hours, listening to communities’ needs and concerns, helping them map their land and draw up boundaries, and building consensus on how the land would be used. They documented those agreements and brought them to the Tanzanian government authorities to formalize them into CCROs.

Their early work and experience with the Hadzabe paid off in 2014, when the Tanzanian government issued the first-ever CCRO to a Maasai community in Monduli district. With their rights to the land guaranteed by law, the community members are thriving. Their cattle stocks are healthy, which creates additional income for people to pay for medical care and send their children to school.

Thanks to Loure’s leadership and his team’s dedication, UCRT has protected more than 200,000 acres of rangeland through CCROs. With their land rights secured, a band of Hadzabe people are ensuring the survival of their hunter-gatherer lifestyle while generating modest revenue from carbon credits and carefully managed cultural tourism.

Loure and UCRT, along with national and international partners, are now looking to replicate the CCRO model throughout Tanzania, with communal grazing lands of nearly 700,000 acres slated for titling in the next year or two. Their goal is to scale up efforts so that community-based land titling becomes a key component of land use planning and management that balances the needs of Tanzania’s people, its environment, and economy.

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**From one form of oppression to another**

Cambodia’s forests are a vital resource for the vast majority of the country’s population, 80 percent of whom live in rural areas and depend on small-scale agriculture for their survival. However, forested areas have been disappearing at breakneck speed, with studies reporting that Cambodia has the fifth-fastest rate of deforestation in the world.

In the early 2000s, the Cambodian government began issuing Economic Land Concessions (ELCs), a long-term leasing system designed to promote large-scale agricultural development such as sugar and rubber plantations. Instead, ELCs became a way to cover up illegal logging operations targeting specific species such as rosewood. Much of this timber is smuggled into China to meet the voracious demand for luxury hongmu furniture, long considered a status symbol for the country’s growing upper middle class.

In a country still recovering from the atrocities under the Khmer Rouge, ELCs became a new form of oppression by displacing poor farmers from their only source of livelihood—their land.

**Protecting the forests that sustain his people**

Leng Ouch was born to a poor family of farmers in Takeo province, about 30 miles south of Phnom Penh, shortly before the Khmer Rouge came to power. During the authoritarian regime, Ouch’s family moved from forest to forest, foraging off the land for food and medicine for survival.

In 1980, a few years after the Cambodian civil war came to an end, Ouch and his family moved to Phnom Penh. With his mother suffering from mental illness and his father working long hours as a pedicab driver to support the family, Ouch was largely left on his own. He made arrangements to enroll at a local school, where he cleaned classrooms and helped teachers in exchange for his education. His father’s earnings were barely enough to make ends meet at home, so Ouch scavenged the streets to find paper to do his homework.

Despite the odds, Ouch persevered and excelled in his studies. He won a scholarship to attend law school and began working with several human rights organizations, a path he chose to help the poor and uneducated.
stand up for their rights against government abuse. Recalling the forests that sustained his family and countless others during the Pol Pot years, he founded the Cambodia Human Rights Task Force (CHRTF), and turned his attention to illegal logging and land rights.

**Going undercover in a dangerous country**

In the hopes that global attention would force the Cambodian government to change its ways, Ouch sought to expose its role in illegal logging to the international community. But in order to do that, he needed to gather and document proof.

Ouch went undercover to gather evidence of illegal logging activities, posing as a laborer, timber dealer, driver, tourist, and even as a cook. He documented the illegal operations of Cambodia’s biggest timber magnate. He then publicly released the photos and video footage he gathered, revealing how ELCs were used as a cover for illegal logging and exposing criminal collusion between timber companies and government officials at all levels of power.

Ouch’s outspoken criticism of the government put him at enormous risk, in a country where environmental activism is dangerous—sometimes even deadly. Chut Wutty, an environmental activist and Ouch’s former colleague, was brutally murdered in 2012; last November, a park ranger and police officer were gunned down while patrolling forests for illegal logging and poaching. Ouch has had to go into hiding at various times, and his family has been intimidated by military police.

In 2014, as a result of growing discontent among Cambodians and increasing scrutiny from the international community, the government canceled 23 land concessions covering 220,000 acres of forest. This included two ELCs that had been granted inside Virachey National Park—an area of rich biodiversity with federally protected status.

With hundreds of thousands still bereft of their land and livelihoods, Ouch’s work goes on. He’s working to stop the government from issuing any more forest clearing licenses and get the logging companies to return the land to the government for registration to its rightful owners. He’s also working with a team of attorneys on international policies to prevent illegal logging.

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A cheap and convenient dumping ground
In Pezinok, a charming vineyard town in western Slovakia, viticulture plays an important part in the local economy, where a castle and museums attract tourists interested in learning about the region’s historic royal wines.

In recent years, however, the country has also become known as a place to dispose of garbage from neighboring countries in Western Europe. In the 1960s, Pezinok became home to a waste dump, built without any permits or safeguards to keep the toxic chemicals from leaching into the soil—just 500 feet away from a residential area.

As it started to reach capacity, a wealthy developer with close ties to regional authorities pushed through plans to build another dumping ground. Despite a 2002 ordinance that banned landfills within city limits, plans for the second dumpsite went through without any public input from the surrounding community.

Meanwhile, residents in Pezinok were left to pay the price from the antiquated landfill. Cancer, respiratory diseases, and allergy rates in the area began to soar, with one particular type of leukemia being reported eight times more than the national average.

‘Dumps Don’t Belong in Towns’
Born and raised in Pezinok, Zuzana Caputova is an attorney a public interest law organization, VIA IURIS, a career path she chose as a way to help people in her community.

For Caputova, the waste dump’s toxic legacy cast a deep shadow both at work and at home. The stench from the nearby landfill wafted into her home, where she kept the windows shut to keep her two young daughters safe. Cancer took an unwelcome foothold when both her uncle and a close colleague’s wife received diagnoses in the same week.

Armed with her legal expertise, she engaged artists, local businesses, wine producers, students, church leaders, and other members of the community in a grassroots campaign to shut down the dumpsite. Caputova and other activists came together and organized peaceful protests, concerts and photographic exhibits and gathered 8,000 signatures in a petition to the European Parliament. In addition to mobilizing civil society, she mounted a relentless legal challenge to the new landfill through the Slovakian and EU judiciaries.

The first demonstration brought together thousands of local residents, which helped bring municipal leaders on board with the campaign.
despite their early skepticism. They heard the citizens’ message loud and clear: “Dumps Don’t Belong in Towns.”

**Rallying civil society in post-Communist Slovakia**
The campaign came to a head in 2013, when the Slovakian Supreme Court ruled that the newly proposed landfill was illegal. The court withdrew permission for the new dumpsite to begin operating, and ordered the decrepit dumpsite to shut down. The verdict echoed a decision from the EU Court of Justice, which affirmed the public’s right to participate in decisions that impact the environment not only in Pezinok but throughout the EU as well.

Caputova, as a member of the VIA IURIS team, is now fighting back new construction laws in Slovakia that would make it easier for developers to bring illegally built projects up to code while weakening public access to environmental information and decision-making. Along with her VIA IURIS colleagues, she is also providing legal assistance for other communities in Slovakia who are fighting industrial pollution.

The victory in Pezinok—the largest mobilization of citizens since the 1989 Velvet Revolution—sets an important precedent for civic engagement in Slovakia, and is inspiring citizens in the country to stand up for their rights to a clean and safe environment.

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Where the leatherback sea turtle calls home
The Northeast Ecological Corridor (NEC) covers 3,000 acres of prime oceanfront property along the north coast of Puerto Rico. In addition to its scenic and recreational value, it has enormous biological significance. The corridor is home to more than 50 rare, threatened or endangered species, some unique to the island, and its proximity to El Yunque National Forest, a UNESCO-designated biosphere reserve, adds to its natural value and uniqueness.

In the late 1990s, with promises to revitalize the area’s economy, developers proposed two megaresorts—3,500 hotel rooms and residential units, multiple golf courses, a shopping mall, and other urban construction—to be built in the corridor. These projects would have destroyed the corridor’s wildlife habitat, threaten the local water supply, and limit public beach access while ignoring the reality that other similar developments in Puerto Rico had failed to bring the economic opportunities that had been promised.

A life rooted in appreciation of nature
Born in Puerto Rico, Luis Jorge Rivera Herrera spent many childhood weekends at a coconut farm that had been owned by his family since 1873. When he was 8 years old, the government seized the family’s farm with plans to build a wastewater treatment plant on the land. As a teenager, he enjoyed surfing. The hobby led him to the Northeast Ecological Corridor, whose scenery and natural beauty brought back memories of his family’s farm. He recalled the experience of seeing bulldozers tear up the cherished family farm—an experience that would form the foundation of his life-long commitment to protect the environment and hold the government accountable to citizen’s rights.

Rivera Herrera went on to study environmental science and built a career in environmental planning and management. In 1999, he came across a newspaper ad about the proposed megaresorts. Thanks to his professional training and personal experience growing up in the region, he knew the area’s recreational and environmental value—and was determined to not let the government pave over it.

Sixteen years and five governors later
Rivera Herrera and a group of close friends began volunteering their time to organize public opposition to the megaresorts. The campaign’s momentum shifted in 2005 with the arrival of a full-time organizer from the Sierra Club, which led to the formation of the Coalition for the Northeast Ecological Corridor. Newly energized, Rivera Herrera drafted a bill to protect the corridor as a nature reserve. The legislation sailed through the lower house of the Puerto Rican legislature, but was ultimately blocked by a handful of senators, one of whom would later be found guilty of bribery and corruption charges.
The bill had died, but by 2007, the Rivera Herrera and the coalition had built a formidable amount of public support for the protection of the corridor. This created a safe political environment for then-Governor Acevedo-Vilá to circumvent the legislature and sign an executive order designating the Northeast Ecological Corridor a protected nature reserve.

Puerto Rico elected a new governor in 2008, who ran on a platform of jumpstarting the economy through construction jobs. The megaresort developers contributed generously to his campaign, and soon after he was elected, in October 2009, Governor Fortuño repealed his predecessor’s designation, leaving the corridor vulnerable to development.

In 2012, Rivera Herrera and the coalition successfully worked with legislators to pass a new bill that designated all public lands in the corridor a protected nature reserve. With overwhelming public support for the corridor and his reelection at risk, Fortuño signed the bill into law. The coalition gained more momentum in April 2013, when the newly elected Governor García-Padilla expanded the corridor’s nature reserve designation to include privately owned land. At every step of the way in the 16-year battle, Rivera Herrera was there to challenge government corruption and advocate for the public’s right to demand protection for the environment.

Rivera Herrera and his coalition colleagues are now mounting a fundraising campaign to help the government purchase the remaining privately owned land in the corridor. They are also leading citizen participation in a plan to develop the corridor as an ecotourism destination, which will generate funding for wildlife management and restoration while revitalizing the local economy.

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The folly of burning trash for clean energy
Curtis Bay is a highly industrialized community in south Baltimore with a history of displacing people to make room for oil refineries, chemical plants, sewage treatment plants, and other facilities that emit pollution. Those left to live within breathing distance of industry have long suffered from respiratory problems such as asthma and lung cancer. In fact, a 2013 study on emissions-related mortality rates found Baltimore to be the deadliest city, with 130 out of every 100,000 residents likely to die each year from long-term exposure to air pollution.

Despite this, in 2010, the state approved plans for the nation’s largest trash incinerator to be built in Curtis Bay with promises to bring “clean” energy to the state. In reality, the developer’s proposal would have the plant burning 4,000 tons of trash—brought in from outside the city—every day. Environmental studies project that burning this much trash would release more mercury than the dirtiest coal-powered plants—less than a mile away from two public schools.

From shy teenager to determined activist
Destiny Watford grew up in a tight-knit neighborhood in Curtis Bay, visiting her grandmother, going to school, and hanging out with her friends at the local public library. During her high school senior year, Watford attended a play called “Enemy of the People.” Set in a small community that was being poisoned by a polluted hot spring—a major tourist attraction for the town—the play raised questions about government’s role and moral responsibilities when people’s health and lives are at risk. The play struck a chord with the shy young teenager, and after discussing it with a school advisor, she co-founded Free Your Voice, a student organization dedicated to community rights and social justice.

With plans for the trash incinerator moving ahead, Watford and Free Your Voice (FYV) decided to take on the campaign to protect their community from the plant’s pollution and create a pathway to a truly clean energy future for the state.
In pursuit of truly clean energy

Watford and fellow students hit the streets, canvassing neighborhoods, organizing protests, and circulating petitions. In their efforts, they encountered a community that had become used to being considered a dumping ground for the rest of the state. Residents shared stories about Curtis Bay’s long history of heavy industry, pollution, and displacement. Informed by these conversations, Watford and FYV took a deeper look at the community’s downtrodden past, and came out determined to bring positive alternatives—thriving communities and green jobs—within reach.

A huge breakthrough moment came when Watford and Free Your Voice students discovered that Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPS), along with other city government agencies and local nonprofits, had signed an agreement to purchase energy from the incinerator. In May 2014, Watford and her fellow students attended a school board meeting to urge them to divest from the project. Destiny gave a compelling presentation, students showcased art and music performances, and parents joined in with testimonies of support. They brought board members to tour Curtis Bay and the proposed incinerator site.

In February 2015, in response to concerns from students and their families, the BCPS board voted to terminate its contract with Energy Answers, the incinerator’s developer. By the fall of that year, all 22 customers canceled their contracts, leaving the incinerator with no market for its product. The victory marked a moment of rebirth for Curtis Bay residents who finally felt that their voices were heard and that their health and lives mattered.

Watford and FYV turned their attention to put intense public pressure on government agencies to pull the project’s permits. In March 2016, the Maryland Department of the Environment declared the incinerator’s permit invalid. The community is now pushing to reclaim the site for truly clean energy alternatives such as a community solar farm and a recycling center. Watford, currently a college student at Towson, continues to organize with Free Your Voice students and other activists to bring that vision to life.

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EMBARGOED UNTIL APRIL 18, 2016 AT 12:01 AM (EDT) / 4:01 AM (GMT)
Peru's race for mining
Over the past two decades, the mining industry in Peru has been growing at breakneck speed. With promises of jobs and economic prosperity, the Peruvian government awarded mining licenses across the country. Despite these promises, rural campesinos, who were rarely consulted in the development of mining projects, largely continue to live in poverty. In many communities, mining waste has polluted the local waterways, affecting local people's drinking water and irrigation needs.

In the northern Peruvian highlands of Cajamarca, where almost half of the region's land has been given away in mining concessions, Colorado-based Newmont, along with Peruvian mining company Buenaventura, owns and operates the Yanacocha Mine. It is one of the largest—and at its height, one of the most profitable—open-pit gold and copper mines in the world.

As the company tapped out the deposit, it began looking for expansion options. In 2010, it proposed developing a new mine to extract a gold deposit just 10 miles away from Yanacocha. The project, dubbed the Conga Mine, called for draining four nearby lakes. One of these, known as Laguna Azul, would be turned into a waste storage pit, threatening the headwaters of five watersheds and Cajamarca's páramo ecosystem, a high-altitude biologically diverse wetland.

A peaceful life, interrupted
In 1994, Máxima Acuña and her husband bought a plot of land in a remote corner of Peru's northern highlands known as Tragadero Grande. They built a small house on the property and lived a peaceful life raising their children. The family lived off the potatoes and other crops they grew, and kept sheep and cows for milk and cheese. Occasionally, she made the long trek into town to sell vegetables, dairy, and woolen handicrafts. Acuña never learned to read or write, but she understood that the land was her lifeblood.

One day in 2011, the mining company came to the Acuñas' door, demanding that she leave her land. When Acuña refused, she was met with brutality. Armed forces came and destroyed her house and possessions, and beat her and one of her daughters unconscious.

The persecution continued. The company sued the family in a provincial court, which found them guilty of illegally squatting on their own land. Acuña was sentenced to a suspended prison term of almost three years, and fined nearly $2,000—a huge sum for a subsistence farmer in Peru.
Traumatized, homeless, but undeterred
Acuña sought legal help from GRUFIDES, an environmental NGO in Cajamarca that was representing local community members in cases against mining companies. With help from her attorney, Mirtha Vásquez, she appealed the ruling and began gathering documents such as her land title that proved she held legitimate property rights to the land claimed by Newmont.

In December 2014, the courts ruled in Acuña’s favor. Her prison sentence was overturned and the court halted her eviction. As a result of this legal victory, the Conga mine has been kept out of Tragadero Grande. Newmont has been unable to move forward with any mining in the area around Laguna Azul.

Acuña continues to face threats and harassment from the mining company and its militarized security contractors. The mining company has built a fence around Acuña’s land, restricting her ability to move about freely. They have destroyed her potato crops, and maintain a close watch on her property to prevent her from planting more. Meanwhile, the legal fight continues to play out in the Peruvian Supreme Court, with more appeals and lawsuits a near certainty.

Despite the trauma and exhaustion, Acuña maintains a remarkable sense of optimism in her continued fight for justice. She has become widely known throughout Latin America for her inspirational courage in standing up against a multinational mining company. The Conga mine has not moved forward. The community has rallied behind Acuña and her victory has brought new life to the struggle to defend Cajamarca’s páramos, water supplies, and people from large-scale gold mining.

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