

# PRESS RELEASE

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**CPF**  
Collaborative Partnership  
on Forests

## **Mexican environmental pioneer wins Wangari Maathai Award Collaborative Partnership on Forests honours Pati Ruiz Corzo**

**6 October 2014, Salt Lake City, USA** – The Mexican environmental campaigner Martha Isabel ‘Pati’ Ruiz Corzo has won the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) Wangari Maathai Award 2014 for her pioneering work to preserve forests and alleviate rural poverty in her native country.

One of the most prestigious forest accolades, the Wangari Maathai Award recognizes extraordinary efforts by an individual to improve and sustain forests and the people who depend on them. The award was established by the CPF to honour the memory of Kenyan environmentalist Wangari Maathai, a champion of forest issues worldwide and the first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize.

Ruiz Corzo is recognized for making conservation profitable for rural communities in the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve, one of the most ecologically diverse areas of Mexico and home to threatened species such as jaguars and green macaws as well as 800 types of butterfly. Through her Sierra Gorda Ecological Group, Ruiz Corzo successfully lobbied the government for the creation of the reserve in 1997 and instituted an intensive programme of conservation education and training for local communities, turning the reserve into a flagship for public-private ecosystem management.

Hundreds of local families who live in the reserve benefit from a ‘payment for ecosystem services’ programme, receiving financial compensation for conserving and replanting trees on their land, which in turn helps preserve local watersheds and reduce soil erosion.

Ruiz Corzo’s organisation also works to protect forests by promoting alternatives to subsistence farming, helping rural communities earn a living through sustainable small enterprises such as beekeeping and eco-tourism.

“Martha’s extraordinary commitment to preserving the biodiversity of her land and to lifting rural communities out of poverty makes her a deserving winner of the Wangari Maathai Award,” said Eduardo Rojas Briales, FAO Assistant Director-General, Forestry, and Chair of the CPF.

“By recognizing the implications of asking subsistence farmers to plant trees on land they had previously used to eke out a living, and putting into place successful mechanisms to offset that lost income, Martha and her organization have established a solid model that can be replicated elsewhere.”

Ruiz Corzo received the USD 20,000 award at a ceremony in Salt Lake City during the XXIV World Congress of the International Union of Forest Research Organizations, one of the members of the CPF. “I believe in the common good not only for the people that live in the Sierra Gorda but also for the conservation of flora and fauna with whom we share this biosphere,” said Ruiz Corzo.

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“The Wangari Maathai Award gives credibility to the innovation needed to give value to environmental services and to communities, and calls attention to the wave of love that we must orchestrate to defend the natural heritage of the planet.”

### **Honourable Mention for Cambodian activist**

The jury also gave a special Honourable Mention to the late Cambodian environmental activist Chut Wutty for his work to end illegal deforestation in Cambodia and protect the rights of indigenous forest dwellers.

Founder of the Natural Resource Protection Group, Wutty advocated tirelessly against the destruction of Cambodia’s natural resources and encouraged local communities to patrol forests to prevent illegal logging. He was killed in 2012 while escorting journalists to see an area of suspected illegal activity. Today marks the second time the CPF has presented the accolade since its launch in 2012, when Nepali activist Narayan Kaji Shrestha received the first ever Wangari Maathai Award.

The CPF comprises 14 international organizations working together to promote forest management, conservation and sustainable development.

For more information on the work of the CPF and the Wangari Maathai Award see [www.cpfweb.org/77034](http://www.cpfweb.org/77034) .