

Media Release

International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples, 9 August 2022

The Role of Indigenous Women in the Land of Papua in Striving for Sustainable Life and Environment

The International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples (*Hari Internasional Masyarakat Adat Sedunia/HIMAS*) 2022, observed on 9 August each year, is bringing up a theme, *The Role of Indigenous Women in the Preservation and Transmission of Traditional Knowledge*.¹ The theme affirms the significant role of Indigenous Women in nurturing and inheriting indigenous knowledge in the sustainability of life and environmental carrying capacity. Customary land and forests are managed using indigenous knowledge, rules and customs which are based upon the values of justice, harmony, and sustainability. The knowledge, actualized in various forms and innovative practices, is inherited collectively from generation to generation.

In the Land of Papua, indigenous knowledge practices are visible in the social system and the sustainable production patterns. The culture of gathering forest products, hunting, farming, cultivating crops and animals, as well as the utilization of medicinal plants, are integrated and nurtured with cultural rituals and are preserved by indigenous social institutions. Such knowledge is inherited through customary education, folklores, poems and songs, dances, makeup art, sculptures and paintings, art objects, and they have been displayed for many years.

However, the existence and rights of indigenous peoples in the Land of Papua have not been fully recognized, respected and protected by the state. The state's economic policies are particularly accommodative and favorable to transnational corporations. Numerous legislative products and their derivative regulations have been created to serve and safeguard the interests of the capital owners, including business expansions on indigenous areas. Indigenous Peoples are driven away, deprived of the access to their lands, deprived of the sources of life and livelihood. Further impacts of these exploitative plantation expansions include environmental degradation, exploitation of laborers, and violence committed by security apparatuses towards indigenous people groups who expressed rejection. Indigenous social institution and administrative authorities which were supposed to be autonomous, are forced to submit to or being coopted by state and corporate interests. Indigenous knowledge and cultural products of indigenous peoples are regulated and turned into commercial commodities, and patented by capital owners.

The deprivation of access to customary land resulted in greater impacts on indigenous women because in addition to suffering from the impacts of environmental degradation, they are also affected by economic injustice. This has compelled indigenous women to allocate

¹<https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/international-day-of-the-worlds-indigenous-peoples-2022.html>

more energy and time for production efforts and to fulfill the family's consumption needs. This is because women have strong connection with the land, forest and environment. Indigenous women assume a role in practicing indigenous knowledge in the utilization of land and forest products in a sustainable manner. Amidst the increasingly tense conflict situation in the Land of Papua, indigenous women are also becoming victims of discrimination, torture and violence, including domestic and sexual violence, and they are also becoming victims of labor exploitation. Female Human Rights Defenders in Papua must deal with intimidation, threats, terror, and criminalization from security apparatuses, or from state-supported corporations.

Nevertheless, the Papuan indigenous women's movement continues to expand in voicing justice and the truth. They demand that the truth be revealed on the violence which is occurring on women, and for the protection of women's rights. The movement, led by female activists and survivors, also demands guarantee in relation to the right to life, right to the truth, freedom of expression, access to sources of livelihood, and the right to be free from discrimination. So far, indigenous women and survivors have shown their roles and struggles in safeguarding and preserving the forest, and in defending their land towards sustainable life and environment.

"Forest for the women is life, the heart. As long as the forest still exists, the women's hearts will still be beating, pounding. If the forest no longer exists, might as well consider the women to be dead. Because it is from forest we live, we eat, we acquire forest products for medicines," said Rosita, a Namblong indigenous woman who sued against the state's policy in granting permits and the presence of oil palm plantation companies which degraded customary forests.

In the momentum of HIMAS 2022, Yayasan Pusaka Bentala Rakyat, Asia Justice and Rights and Indigenous Women Environmental Human Rights Defenders activists from the Land of Papua, have formulated the following recommendations and demands:

Call on the national and regional Governments to:

1. Recognize, respect and protect the existence and rights of indigenous peoples, particularly the women - formally – including the right to life, and right to customary land and forest;
2. Respect the rights of indigenous peoples in controlling, preserving and developing indigenous knowledge, culture and innovative technologies, including human resources, flora and fauna, seeds, oral traditions, works of art, and other cultural expressions;
3. Undertake formal measures and effective actions, by engaging the survivors, to admit the violence which occurred, and take the necessary steps to stop and resolve human rights violations and political conflicts, including establishing mechanisms to reveal the truth and tribunals which favor towards the fulfillment of the rights of survivors and indigenous peoples;
4. Implement legal policies and effective actions to respect the rights and empower the roles of women in safeguarding, preserving and managing land, forest dan natural

- environment; and to protect Environmental Human Rights Defenders, including Indigenous Women Environmental Human Rights Defenders;
5. Assure and engage Indigenous Women in a meaningful manner in the formulation of policies and efforts of utilization of natural resources which affect the lives of Indigenous Women and the society at large based upon the Free, Prior, Informed, Consent (FPIC) principles;
 6. Implement the stipulated Provincial Regional Regulation (*Perdasi*) of Papua Number 8 Year 2013 regarding Protection of the Victims of Domestic Violence, and Special Regional Regulation (*Perdasus*) of Papua Number 1 Year 2011 regarding Restoration of Papuan Women's Rights for the Victims of Violence and Human Rights Violations;
 7. Undertake legal measures and effective actions in carrying out evaluations and impose the legal sanction of permit revocation for administrative violations and environmental crimes committed by companies which are developing the businesses of oil palm plantation, food crop cultivation and energy, logging and mining, in the areas of indigenous peoples;
 8. Empower and improve the quality of life prosperity of indigenous peoples through sustainable production efforts based upon indigenous knowledge and by prioritizing indigenous peoples, availability of decent basic necessities, which include livelihood efforts, land ownership, adequate housing with access to health, education, and employment.

Call on Corporations to:

9. Respect the existence and rights of indigenous peoples, with particular regard to the rights to customary land and forest;
10. Respect the rights of indigenous peoples in controlling, preserving and developing indigenous knowledge, culture and innovative technologies, including human resources, flora and fauna, seeds, oral traditions, works of art, and other cultural expressions;
11. Assure the implementation of meaningful consultation by fulfilling the Free, Prior, Informed, Consent (FPIC) principle on an activity and/or efforts of utilization of natural resources with potential effects on the lives of indigenous peoples.
12. Assure and engage Indigenous Women in a meaningful manner in the formulation of policies and efforts of utilization of natural resources which affect the lives of Indigenous Women and the society at large;

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