
[Indonesia: Report on paper industry's abuses on human rights](#)

"Indonesian police and company security forces are responsible for persistent human rights abuses against indigenous communities involved in the massive pulp and paper industry in Sumatra", Human Rights Watch said in a new report released on January 7, 2003. Abuses include land seizures without compensation and brutal attacks on local demonstrators.

"Without Remedy: Human Rights Abuse and Indonesia's Pulp and Paper Industry", a 90-page report, extensively documents the underlying links between disregard for human rights and unsound forestry practices.

Indonesia's pulp and paper industry has rapidly expanded since the late 1980s to become one of the world's top ten producers. But the industry has accumulated debts of more than US\$20 billion, and expanding demand consumes wide swathes of Sumatra's lowland tropical forests. This land is claimed by indigenous communities, who depend on them for rice farming and rubber tapping. The loss of access to forests, together with companies' hiring from outside the province, has been devastating to local livelihoods, leading to violent conflicts.

Asia Pulp & Paper (APP) is Indonesia's leading paper producer, and owner of one of the largest stand-alone pulp mills in the world, the Indah Kiat mill in Riau, Sumatra. The mill's primary fiber supplier, Arara Abadi, established its pulpwood plantation in the 1980s-90s, under then President Soeharto. Arara Abadi, backed by state security forces, routinely seized land for the plantations from indigenous communities without due process and with little or no compensation.

Since the fall of Soeharto in May 1998, local residents have attempted to press their claims, but have met with unresponsive law enforcement. With no remedy for their grievances, communities have increasingly turned to vigilantism. Arara Abadi has responded with violence and arrests.

In its new report, Human Rights Watch details three cases in 2001 in which local villagers in Mandiangin, Betung, and Angkasa/ Belam Merah, frustrated by unresolved disputes with Arara Abadi, set up blockades or began logging plantation trees. Hundreds of club-wielding company militia attacked residents, seriously injuring nine and detaining sixty-three. Indonesian police, who trained the civilian militias and also were present during the attacks, were complicit in all three cases. Incidents of ongoing violence against villagers refusing to give up their land to APP suppliers continued to be reported in Riau last year.

Out of hundreds of assailants, Human Rights Watch is aware of only two who were brought to trial, and those two, convicted of assault and battery, were released after thirty days' time served. Human Rights Watch does not condone illegal actions by protesting villagers, and recognizes the company's need to protect personnel and property. But the use of excessive force by company-funded militia cannot be justified, and impunity for those responsible for the beatings is directly fuelling the cycle of vigilante justice. Further abuses are likely to continue under current conditions of impunity, financial pressure, and lack of internal corporate guidelines for security, Human Rights Watch warned.

The majority of police and military spending (70 percent) comes from off-budget business ventures, many of which are in the forestry sector. These business ties set up an economic conflict of interest in law enforcement. In addition, Arara Abadi's security personnel have no guidelines for the use of force and are not held accountable for violations of the rights of local people.

Excerpts from "Indonesia: Paper Industry Threatens Human Rights" press release, Human Rights Watch, sent by by Liz Weiss, e-mail: WEISSE@HRW.ORG . Full release available at <http://www.hrw.org/press/2003/01/indo010703.htm> , and full report at <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/indon0103/>