
Indonesia: A new victim related to Indorayon

Indorayon's pulp and rayon factory (PT IIU) in Porsea, North Sumatra, has provoked a long socio-environmental conflict in the region, where villagers and local NGOs have been demanding its closure -due to the pollution affecting Lake Toba because of the factory effluents, the destruction of the forests of the area and the plantation of tree monocultures to obtain raw material- while the mill's workers want to keep it open in the absence of other job opportunities in the region. In March 1999 the government -which has proved unable to find a fair solution to the problem- decided to temporarily close the factory on environmental reasons (see WRM Bulletin 21). But recently it decided to give a permission for the reopening of the mill.

Unfortunately, the situation of confrontation and violence in the area has not ended. On the contrary it has recently claimed a new victim: Herman Sitorus, an engineering high school student who was shot by a North Tapanuli police officer on June 21st. The incident happened when the police repressed a demonstration by a crowd from Porsea at Parparean City demanding the release of thirteen villagers from the Joint Community Post at Sirait Uruk who had been kidnapped by unidentified armed men the night before. The condition of a further 27 people remains unknown.

WALHI (Indonesian Forum for the Environment) condemned this senseless death and urged the government to establish an independent team to investigate the case. WALHI also urged the Police Chief to immediately clarify the use of force against the villagers and claimed that the police were legally, morally and materially responsible for the incident. Regarding the unsolved conflict of Indorayon the government was urged to postpone the reopening of the factory until a comprehensive study on its environmental impact is performed.

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