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## Struggling to Stay Afloat: The People of Pari Island, Indonesia, against Injustice

For many islands and low-lying coastal regions, rising sea levels are one of the most perceptible impacts of climate change. The higher global temperatures rise, the more frequent and extreme the floods become: the connection is direct. Indonesia, where over four million people are exposed to annual flooding, is particularly exposed to rising sea levels due to its long coastline and geographic position. Just how high the water will rise in the future, depends on how high global temperatures will rise. (1)

### **Pari Island**

Pari Island (Pulau Pari) is a two-hour trip by ferry from Indonesia's busy capital city of Jakarta, located in the Thousand Islands regency. The regency is popular with visitors from the capital city, creating economic opportunities for local communities, which, for the rest, are mostly dependent on fishing.

Its popularity moved the Indonesian government to earmark it as one of the “ten new Balis” – Bali being probably the best-known tourism destination in Indonesia. (2) This 10 mega project known as KSPN (Kawasan Strategis Pariwisata Nasional - National Tourism Strategic Area), aims to improve access to 10 tourist destinations through initiatives such as building new docks, airports and creating special economic zones to attract foreign investors. Although this might sound like a good plan, in fact, it is mainly targeting the big investors, in detriment to local communities' small businesses.

But that plan is not the only threat that the residents of Pari Island confront.

In 2021, the community in Pari saw its houses and local business under water, not once, but twice. On both occasions, the sea rose higher and higher, and flooded all the houses on Star Beach, in the southwest of the island, and on Virgin Beach, the hub of tourism on the north side.

Although there has always been flooding in Pari, the frequency and intensity have increased noticeably over the past years. Eleven per cent of the island's surface has already disappeared into the sea.

Bobby, a fisherfolk born and raised on the Island, leads a coalition called “Save Pulau Pari” (Save Pari Island). The coalition serves as a space for people to discuss what is happening to them on their island and advocate for their rights. *“Some years ago, we could still catch much more fish. But the environment has changed a lot in recent years, and yields have declined steadily. Today there are far fewer species of fish than just a few years ago. For a few days after the floods, I could not go out to fish, as I had to help with clearing up the village and cleaning the beaches. I also had to repair my boat. The water had washed it ashore and smashed it against a tree,”* explained Bobby.

The floods have several consequences for the population. People are unable to fish during and

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immediately after the floods while their houses get severely damaged by the water. Besides, tourism stops, leaving many people who offer guest rooms, food, snorkelling equipment, etc. without income. Also, the wells that provide drinkable water become salty with the floods, forcing people to buy fresh water, which creates another pressure to the income of these families.

Asmania, a local resident from Pari Island lost 300 of the 500 fish that were being reared in aquacultures off the coast during the 2021 floods. She expressed concerns *“about the way the women of the island are being doubly impacted by climate change. Family incomes are falling steadily, yet women must still manage to look after their families.”*

## **The struggle for their land**

Residents of Pari Island have experienced first hand the need to protect their lands and livelihoods from corporate take-overs and profit-making agendas.

In 2015, PT Bumi Pari Asri (BPA) company, a subsidiary of Bumi Raya Utama Group, owned by a conglomerate named Adijanto Priosoetanto, attempted to control over 90 per cent of the island for managing all tourist activities. The other 10 per cent of the Island belongs to the government and is to be used as a research and conservation area. The disputes arose because most of the residents do not have official land titles although some have lived there for generations. Pari Island is one of the few dozen islands which are affected by the rampant privatization for corporate-led tourism. (3)

Since then, several people have been criminalized under the claim of being illegally occupying the land and others were forced to pay rent to the company. (4) Meanwhile, the company has claimed the beach called ‘Pasir Perawan’, which is a key area of the communities’ tourism. In consequence, when residents try to manage the beach, they face intimidation.

In the process of resisting this corporate take over of land, women have taken up a major role standing up to security guards. The community has created a powerful network around them, and found the support of many national organizations and activists under the ‘Save Pulau Pari’ Coalition. (5)

Residents and allies have successfully challenged the process of the corporation gaining land titles and the National Ombudsman declaring that the process involved maladministration. They also successfully challenged the imprisonment of several residents who were eventually released. (6) The National Land Agency revised the process and the hope is that it re-establishes the legitimate rights of the communities in Pari Island, but the process is still on-going. (7)

## **Another Injustice in the Hands of Corporations**

On top of these on-going struggles, the residents of Pari Island need to confront another injustice that is threatening the very survival of those lands and mangroves they have cared for and protected for generations.

The 1500 inhabitants of Pari Island have not contributed to the climate crisis. Yet, they are suffering the consequences. This is why this crisis is not only an issue of pollution, but it is also an issue of justice. While those most responsible for the pollution and destruction that causes the climate crisis are relatively insulated from its impacts, it is those who have contributed the least that are likely to feel the effects most significantly. Edi, a fisherman and guesthouse owner in Pari Island explains this: *“A handful of people are destroying the environment and are doing so for their own personal*

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*benefit. But it is severely impacting other people like us here on Pari Island.”*

The fact is that the brunt of the responsibility for the climate crisis and, thus, for the impacts being felt especially in the global South, lies far away from Pari Island; it rests mainly with the wealthy countries in the North. And with the multinational corporations located there.

That is the reason why Bobby, Arif, Edi and Asmania, all residents of Pari Island, are seeking justice on behalf of the entire Island. They are taking legal action against one of the major emitters of carbon dioxide in the world and hence a major actor responsible for their situation: the Holcim cement corporation. They have filed an application for conciliation in Zug, Switzerland, where the headquarters of the Holcim group is located.

Holcim corporation is the world's leading cement manufacturer and is one of the 50 largest corporate emitters of carbon dioxide worldwide. One study shows that the Swiss corporation emitted more than seven billion tonnes of carbon dioxide between 1950 and 2021. That is more than twice the amount generated by Switzerland as a whole during the same period. (8) Owing to its decades-long and excessive emissions, the corporation bears a substantial share of the responsibility for climate change.

The residents of Pari Island are not being deceived by the greenwashing attempts of Holcim. Its 2022 Climate Report calls for a “net-zero journey”, with claims of “net-zero buildings”, “net-zero concrete”, “carbon neutral products”, “carbon neutral construction”, among many others. (9) All this wording hides the fact that the company will be able to continue to expand (and pollute) as long as elsewhere, some offset projects are claiming to be compensating the pollution. The reality of offsets is far away from the illusion it sells. Offsetting provides a tool for corporations to keep profiting from a capitalist system hooked on fossil fuels, while largely creating devastating local impacts where these projects are being established. (10)

For example, EvopactZERO, “the first carbon-neutral concrete in Switzerland” (11), developed by Holcim, claims to be ‘carbon neutral’ because they argue that the emitted carbon dioxide is compensated by offset projects in Switzerland or India, from South Pole’s portfolio, a carbon finance consulting firm.

This is the first time that a Swiss company is asked to stand up to its legal responsibility for its role in the climate crisis. The case is supported by Swiss Church Aid HEKS/EPER, Indonesian NGO WALHI and the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR). Join and support the residents of Pari Island in their struggle against the very real and direct impacts of the climate crisis:

[Sign their call to hold Holcim accountable here.](#)

(1) This information and testimonies in this article are from the campaign “Call for Climate Justice”, unless otherwise stated by the references. [See the campaign here.](#)

(2) Archyde, [Ten new Balis: Indonesia is planning controversial mega-projects for tourism](#), 2021.

(3) AASYP, [Save Pulau Pari: the risks of increased tourism in the ASEAN region](#), 2019.

(4) KIARA, [Residents fight for land ownership on pari Island](#), 2017, and Environmental Justice Atlas, [Locals against the privatization of the Pari island](#) (Pulau Pari), Indonesia, 2019.

(5) [Land Rights Now!. Save Pulau Pari!](#)

(6) Idem (3)

(7) Walhi, [Kembalikan Hak Konstitusi dan Hak atas Tanah kepada Warga Pulau Pari !!!](#), 2020.

(8) Richard Heede, [Carbon History of Holcim Ltd: Carbon dioxide emissions 1950-2021, Climate](#)

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[Accountability Institute](#), 2022.

(10) WRM Bulletin 254, [Offsets: Feeding the Illusion of a \(Sustainable\) \(Green\) \(Carbon Neutral\) \(Nature-Based\) \(Net-zero emissions\) Capitalism](#).

(11) South Pole, [Case Study: Holcim and Switzerland's first carbon-neutral concrete](#).