
Indonesia: Condemning Human Rights and Environmental Violations in the Merauke National Strategic Project, in Papua

Press Release of Yayasan Pusaka Bentala Rakyat
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Condemning the Serakahnomics Project Policy and the Tolerance of Human Rights and Environmental Violations in the Merauke National Strategic Project

President Prabowo Subianto, in his state address and in several meetings, coined the phrase "serakahnomics (greedy economics)." He highlighted the existence and business activities of corporations driven by greed, manipulation, unfairness, and profiteering at the expense of the people. The president called them economic vampires, parasites that suck the blood of the people to acquire excessive resources and maximize profits. The president's rhetorical speech appeared harsh and intended to remind people of the economic principles as stipulated in Article 33 of the 1945 Constitution.

On Tuesday (16/9/2025), the Coordinating Minister for Food Affairs, Zulkifli Hasan, stated that the government will accelerate the development of a national food, energy, and water area in Wanam, Merauke Regency, South Papua Province. The government is targeting a total land acquisition of up to 1 million hectares for food, energy, and water self-sufficiency in Merauke. Changes to spatial planning and land use rights, as well as other necessary matters will be resolved.

"And those which already have spatial planning, according to the Forestry Minister's report, are 481,000 hectares," said Zulkifli Hasan.

The explanation given by the Coordinating Minister for Food Affairs, Zulkifli Hasan, regarding the facilitation and acceleration of projects with the conversion of forest areas on a large scale is a manifestation of the ruler's arbitrary power in state policies and actions to validate and provide active support for corporations and project operators who are developing National Strategic Projects (PSN) in the name of food and energy self-sufficiency in Merauke Regency area, even though it is contrary to the 1945 Constitution, violates Human Rights and the principles of environmental sustainability.

The fact is that PSN Merauke has been implemented without any meaningful consultation and involvement of the affected indigenous peoples to provide their free, prior, and informed consent to the development of PSN Merauke in their customary areas, which is in line with the principle of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC). PSN Merauke was launched without any transparency of information and involvement of indigenous peoples in obtaining environmental permits, the transfer and utilization of customary land rights, plantation business permits and land use rights, and so on, as provided for in the laws and regulations.

Image

Merauke National Strategic Project. Photo: Gecko Project, 2025.

The implementation of PSN Merauke, which has been carried out for more than a year, has resulted in serious contradictions and harms that became concerns and impair the affected indigenous peoples. There has been violence and coercion, destruction and loss of food sources, traditional occupations, environmental damage and loss of forests with important ecosystems of up to thousands of hectares.

The operators of the Merauke Food Production Center (KSPP) development company, as well as the sugarcane and bioethanol plantations, escorted by armed military personnel, have cleared and destroyed customary forests, swamps, savannas, and sacred sites, without regard for the people's rights and grievances, or the sustainability of biodiversity with high conservation value. We documented that since 2024 to August 2025, PSN Merauke has destroyed and cleared more than 19,000 hectares of forest. This deforestation rate contributes to increased Greenhouse Gas Emissions and is a manifestation of the government's disregard for its commitment to addressing climate change.

The Malind Anim and Yei indigenous peoples did not make the decisions freely, and were forced to accept compensation in the form of "compassionate money" to hand over their customary land rights to the sugarcane plantation companies, PT Global Papua Abadi (GPA) and PT Murni Nusantara Mandiri (MNM), valued at around Rp300,000 per hectare (or Rp3,000 per meter), a compensation value that is unfair and incomparable with the socio-economic benefits and environmental services provided by the land and the forests.

The appropriation of customary land and forests through permits, compensation, and promises of development welfare appears to be a normal and legal process. These methods and the labeling of legality have allowed greedy rulers and entrepreneurs to control and own the means of production on a large scale. PT GPA and PT MNM, as well as eight sugarcane and bioethanol plantation companies in PSN Merauke own concessions covering over 560,000 hectares, the beneficial ownership of which are held by the Fangiono Family and Martua Sitorus. These two economic powers also hold permits for oil palm plantations in Merauke, Sorong, Sorong Selatan, and Teluk Bintuni, totaling over 300,000 hectares. The concentration of land ownership in the hands of a handful of individuals is a manifestation of "serakahnomics", whereby the maximum limit on land ownership is being violated.

We, Yayasan Pusaka Bentala Rakyat, condemn the PSN (National Strategic Project) policies and practices in the name of national food, energy, and water development in Merauke Regency, by way of facilitating the ease and acceleration of permits for the acquisition of customary land and the conversion of large-scale forest areas. This demonstrates the practice of serakahnomics. Minister

Zulhas's arbitrariness in encouraging and issuing changes to spatial planning, HGU, and other permits is a manifestation of serakahnomics and injustice, which benefits corporations at the expense of the people.

We call the government to stop issuing permits for large-scale forest area release and extractive natural resource practices that damage the environment, which are carried out without any studies and consideration of ecological balance, sustainability of natural resources and continuity of intergenerational rights, which disregard the rights of indigenous peoples, only to gain economic benefits for a handful of corporations.

We request President Prabowo to immediately evaluate and review PSN Merauke, which is controlled by and benefits greedy rulers and entrepreneurs, at the expense of and by excluding indigenous peoples and the environment. The government should take effective measures to fulfill and enjoy human rights, not just delivering rhetorics, but rather, taking actions to respect and protect the rights of indigenous peoples and the environment.

We also request the regional government officials of Merauke Regency and South Papua Province to actively exercise their special authority as stipulated in the Papua Special Autonomy Law, which are recognized to regulate and act to manage the interests of indigenous peoples, respect and protect the aspirations and rights of the indigenous peoples who are affected by PSN Merauke, and actualize a just and sustainable people-based economy.

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[See the images here.](#)

Note:

During the administration of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Vice President M. Jusuf Kalla (2009-2014), Zulkifli Hasan served as Minister of Forestry and issued permits to release forest areas to corporations to become plantations, for a total area of ??approximately 1.6 million hectares. Most of these permits were for locations in the Land of Papua, for an area of ??680,188 hectares, which were given to a handful of companies. The local indigenous peoples were unaware of and were never consulted regarding the granting of these permits, which led to conflicts, for example, between the Awyu Tribe and seven oil palm plantation companies from Menara Group, the developer of the Tanah Merah project in Boven Digoel Regency, which controls 270,000 hectares of natural forest land.