# Indonesia: The Minister of Forestry Does Not Recognize the Existence of Indigenous Papuans

PRESS RELEASE

**Lawsuit by Indigenous Papuans Against the South Papua Food and Energy National Strategic Project**

Jakarta, 20 August 2026. The hearing on the lawsuit by five representatives of the Wambon Tribe Indigenous People of Boven Digoel Regency against the Minister of Forestry has reached the substantiation agenda at the Jakarta State Administrative Court. Today's hearing was convened offline, the indigenous people's lawyers submitted documentary evidence to strengthen the argument of the lawsuit.

The Minister of Forestry of the Republic of Indonesia issued Decision Number 591 Year 2025 which transforms 486,939 hectares of customary forests into non-forest areas for the Development of the National Food, Energy, and Water Self-Sufficiency Area as part of the national strategic project (PSN). This decision is part of the planned deforestation of 2 million hectares of customary forests in the Land of Papua.

The Minister of Forestry has responded in writing to the lawsuit filed by the indigenous people. The advocacy team to save the Papua forests and indigenous peoples have made special notes to the Minister's response. In this case, Tigor Hutapea, a representative of the advocacy team, states as follows;

"*The Forestry Minister's answer implicitly does not recognize the existence of the five plaintiffs as indigenous peoples and owners of customary areas who have owned and managed the customary forests for generations, the Forestry Minister requested that this lawsuit not be accepted. The advocacy team views that in forestry governance, the Forestry Minister is using a positivistic mindset and adheres to the* domein verklaring *principle inherited from the Dutch colonial government, thus claiming that customary areas are considered unowned, to be absolutely controlled by the state. This is the cause of the rampant agrarian and natural resource conflicts.*

*We are questioning the Forestry Minister's action plan in the recognition of customary forests, when the fact is that in 2023 the five plaintiffs have submitted an application for recognition of customary forests to the Minister of Environment and Forestry, but the process has not been carried out up to the present day. However, for the sake of the national strategic project, the forestry minister, without the consent of indigenous peoples nor adequate studies, has changed the status of the forests into customary forest areas to be used as oil palm plantations to fulfill the energy self-sufficiency ambitions. The Minister of Finance has violated the indigenous peoples' rights."* added Tigor.

The lawsuit also highlights the threat of deforestation which leads to dire impacts on the environmental ecosystem. There are 166,325,314 hectares of High Conservation Value (HCV) with

significant biological, ecological, social, and cultural values at the local, regional, or global levels. There is the largest peatland area of 51,333 hectares in Boven Digoel and 61,370 hectares of primary forest which must be protected and should not be burdened with permits. The deforestation removes the potential carbon reserves of 27,079,656 C tons and results in a potential release of carbon emissions of 99,292,072 $CO_2$ tons (tons of carbon dioxide), this is affecting Indonesia's climate commitment. For this reason, this lawsuit demands that Decision 591 Year 2025 be declared null and void.

**The Advocacy Team To Save The Papua Forests And Indigenous Peoples**

Tigor Hutapea: 0812-8729-668

Nelson: 0813-9682-0400