

Papuan Voices in business and human rights in the Anthropocene: A climate for change?

Sharing perspectives and experiences

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I am an indigenous Papuan from the western part of the island of Papua. Now I am working with the Papuan People's Assembly as a human rights advisor. The Papuan People's Assembly is an organization representing indigenous Papuan created by the special autonomy law of Indonesia with mandate promoting, protecting, and empowering indigenous Papuan rights. I would like to share some key issues based on my personal experience.

1. Adaptation and mitigation

In my opinion, there are two things needed to strengthen the accountability of our government and mining companies, namely adaptation and cooperation. Governments and companies, in every policy and action, need to take the context of indigenous people's lives into consideration. The environment is the very center of their lives. I believe that by respecting basic human rights, environmental issues can be addressed more efficiently. Working together with indigenous peoples would actually facilitate the work of government and companies. This adaptation could also contribute to implementing regulations or guidelines for business principles in line with human rights. Many administrative policies and procedures would benefit from this new perspective of desirable cooperation.

Since 2006, I have worked in indigenous communities in Papua and Kalimantan, Indonesia. We work to strengthen documentation skills, media campaign skills and advocate for indigenous voices. In Papua, we created Papuan Voices, and in Kalimantan we created Dayak Voices.

These groups use cameras to document and archive the life stories, culture and knowledge of indigenous peoples, and to tell about life in Papua from their perspective, so that everyone, including the government and companies, can get a good idea of conditions in Papua. In Papua, indigenous peoples have very rich traditional knowledge and values which can contribute to protecting the environment and protecting human rights. For example, in Merauke district (southern part of the island of Papua), the indigenous Malind people see humans, animals and plants as one family. They make up a whole and support each other in life. So, every clan in the Malind indigenous people has a responsibility to protect animals

and plants. The Samkakai clan must protect the kangaroos, the Mahuze clan must protect the sago palms, the Gebze clan must protect coconut trees, the Basik-basik clan must protect pigs. The Malind indigenous people believe that if animals and plants become extinct, humans will also become extinct. They must protect and care for each other.

It is important to know traditional values like these which remind us that we already have the power to answer the problems of climate change and lack of respect for human rights issues. There is no need to search for help outside. This means that we think to think about how to strengthen indigenous communities for the sake of preserving the environment. Indigenous people's voices need to be heard because they have a vital role in protecting our future on this planet.

2. Indigenous Peoples Participation

From 2019 until this year, I have worked as a human rights advisor for the Papuan People's Council. The Papuan People's Council is an institution of the indigenous Papuan people formed under the Special Autonomy Law in Papua, Indonesia. In November 2020, I and 84 representatives of the indigenous Papuan people were arrested by the police when we were about to hold a hearing. The hearing had to do with the participation of indigenous Papuans in government policies. From this experience of being arrested, until now, I see that the security approach is still too dominant in Papua. It is counterproductive for advancing human rights and environmental protection. Why? Security measures make people afraid and hesitate to become involved. In addition, the adaptability of the government, as well as companies, becomes difficult. The government and companies cannot listen to the aspirations of people who are afraid, who they in turn do not understand or trust.

3. Peoples Leads Development

Government and companies stand to benefit from greater knowledge about the lives of indigenous peoples and their close connection to their environment. In this way, respect for human rights and the environment can meet on a common ground, thanks to the participation of people who are free from fear. The key to resolving the conflict between indigenous peoples and governments and companies lies with the people whose lives are directly impacted. They are at the forefront of any improvements to human rights and the environment. The peoples can lead the way.