

Food & Energy Project & Armed Conflict in West Papua

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Key take aways:

1. West Papua is a “postcolony” as defined by Achille Mbembe (not as a historical postcolonial territory) governed by colonial rationality
2. West Papua meets the category of Non-International Armed Conflict under International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and the status applies to the whole Papua, including Merauke
3. Food & Energy Project should not be excluded from the lens of armed conflict
4. IHL is more effective than HR framework to prevent state armed forces from penetrating civilian roles and civilians object such as PSN
5. It’s time to act to stop the ongoing violence against the Marind, not just to analyse it.

How do we make sense of the food & energy project?

Concept of “postcolony”:

- under control of **colonial rationality** of the Indonesian state.
- ruled by the logic of chaos that justifies **outsourcing the power of the state** to private actors for private ends, namely the military and the oligarchy.
- ruled by political improvisation and excess which authorise **the private actors to operate with free reign.**
- ruled by a regime of violence meted out by corporations and political machinery which not **only demolish the Papuan people but also their environment, notably the virgin forest, water, and land.**

(Mbembe 2001: 102).



“Indirect private government”

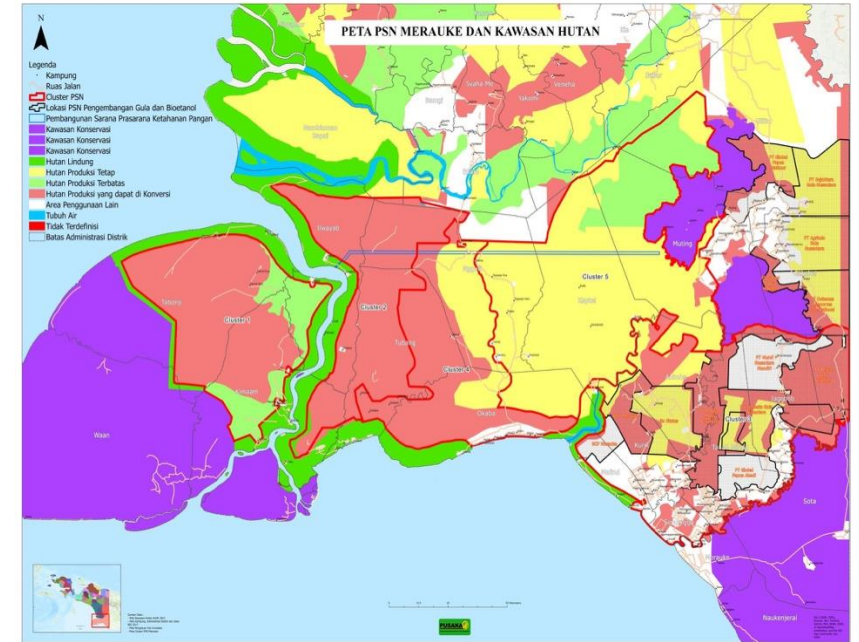
...Functions supposed to be public, and obligations that flow from sovereignty, are increasingly performed by private operators for private ends. Soldiers and policemen live off the inhabitants; officials supposed to perform administrative tasks sell the public service required and pocket what they get. The question is how such a manner of ruling becomes institutionalized and becomes part of that form of government we are describing as *indirect private government* (Mbembe 2001: 80).



Haji Isam escorted by the Indonesian army in July 2024. Courtesy of *Yayasan Pusaka Bentala Rakyat*, 2024

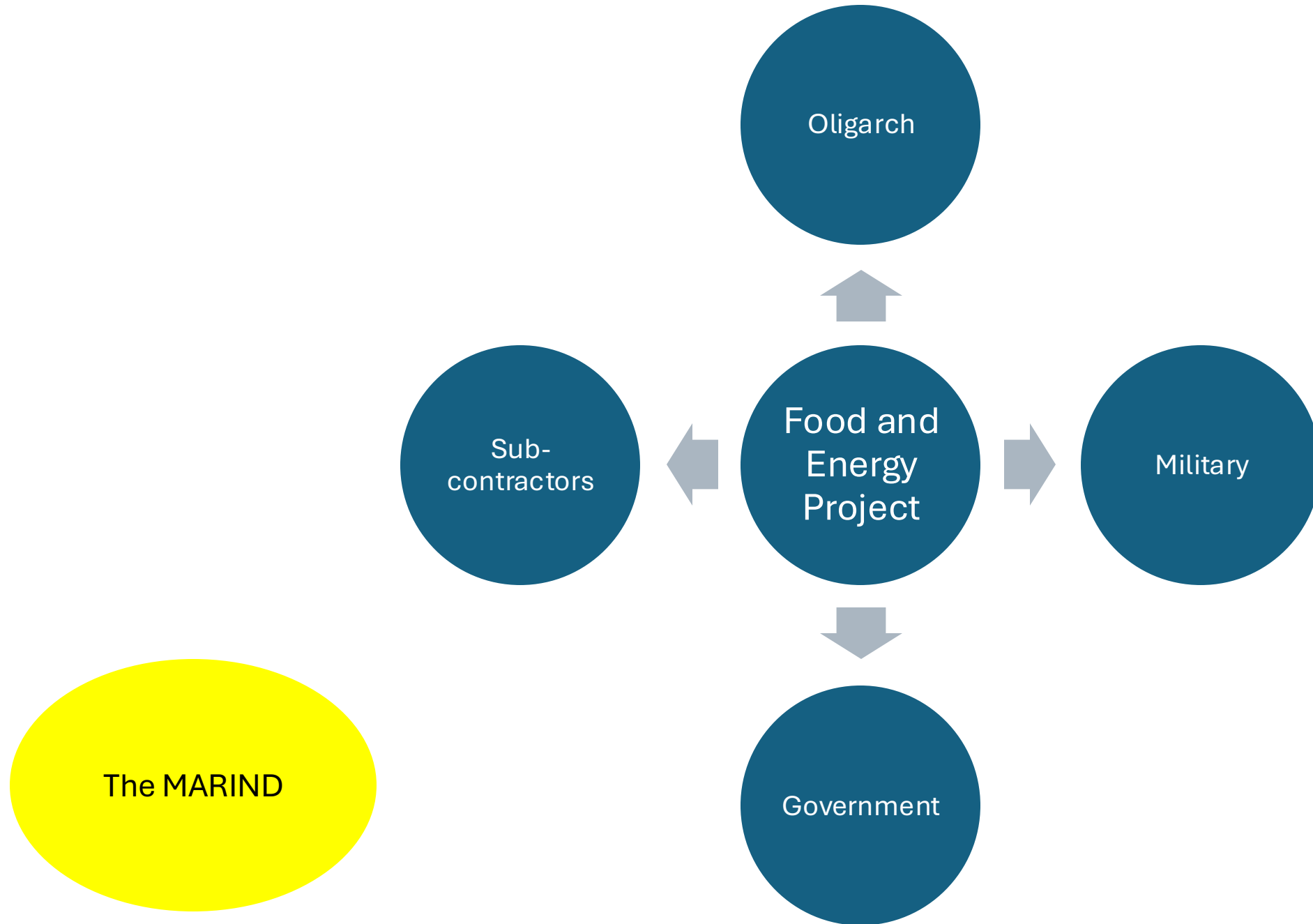
What is Food and Energy Project?

- 1,2 million hectares for rice
- 560 thousand for sugar cane – bioethanol
- Overlap with protected primary forest, peatland areas, & High Conservation Value
- Constitutes the world largest deforestation at play (see Mighty Earth 2025, Yayasan Pusaka Bentala Rakyat 2024; 2025)
- Threatens the existence of 50.000 Marind tribe, the landowner (Yayasan Pusaka Bentala Rakyat 2024; 2025)



Cluster	Area Size (Ha)	Forest Area			
		HPK	HPT	HPK	APL
Cluster 1	372,000	284,000	87,000	0	189
Cluster 2	283,000	282,000	0	626	440
Cluster 3	634,000	299,000	115,000	0	218,000
Cluster 4	353,000	241,000	0	98,000	13,000
Cluster 5	654,000	5,300	114,000	532,000	2,700
	2,296,000	1,111,300	316,000	630,626	234,329

Yayasan Pusaka Bentala Rakyat, 2025



Oligarch

Sub-contractors

Food and Energy Project

Military

Government

The MARIND

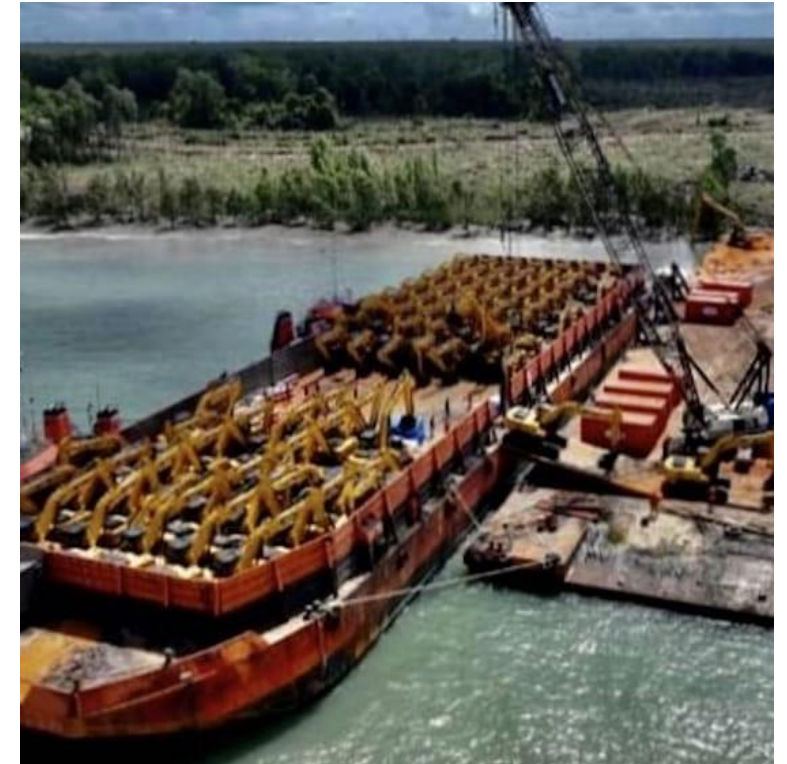
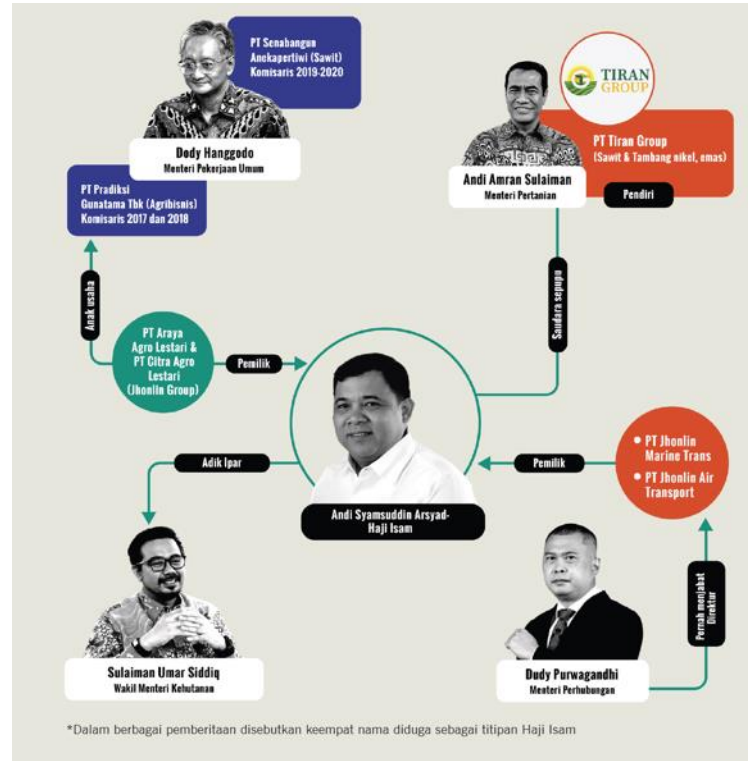
Who controls the project?

- Top right: Martias Fanggiono(*) and Martua Sitorus (*) for the sugarcane project
- Bottom right: Haji Isam (*) for the rice project



Oligarch in the field

- Haji Isam has been contracted to do a road project inside the PSN Merauke (1km wide and 135.5km long)
- He is the centre of the connection with Minister of Agriculture, Minister of Infrastructure, Minister of Mining, and Deputy Minister of Forestry



Rincian Yonif PDR

Data TNI, 2 Oktober 2024

1. Yonif 801/Nduka Adyatma Yuddha
Lokasi penempatan:
Kab. Keerom, Papua
2. Yonif 802/Wimani Mambe Jaya
Kab. Sarmi, Papua
3. Yonif 803/Ksatria Yuddha Kentswuri
Kab. Boven Digoel, Papua Selatan
4. Yonif 804/Dharma Bhakti Asasta Yuddha
Kab. Merauke, Papua Selatan
5. Yonif 805/Ksatria Satya Wanninggap
Sorong, Papua Barat Daya

Keterangan:

Tiap yonif terdiri atas 691 personel, gabungan komando daerah militer (kodam).

Yonif berada di bawah komando Kodam XVIII/Kasuari dan XVII/Cenderawasih.



Persiapan dalam pembentukan Yonif PDR

Membagi spesifikasi keahlian personel, di antaranya konstruksi dan produksi.



Membekali personel dengan ilmu pertanian dari Universitas Pertahanan.



Melengkapi yonif dengan alat pertanian untuk mendukung program pertanian.



Tugas Yonif PDR



Melindungi masyarakat dari kerawanan dan ancaman militer maupun nonmiliter.



Membantu masyarakat untuk menanam komoditas pangan di daerah.

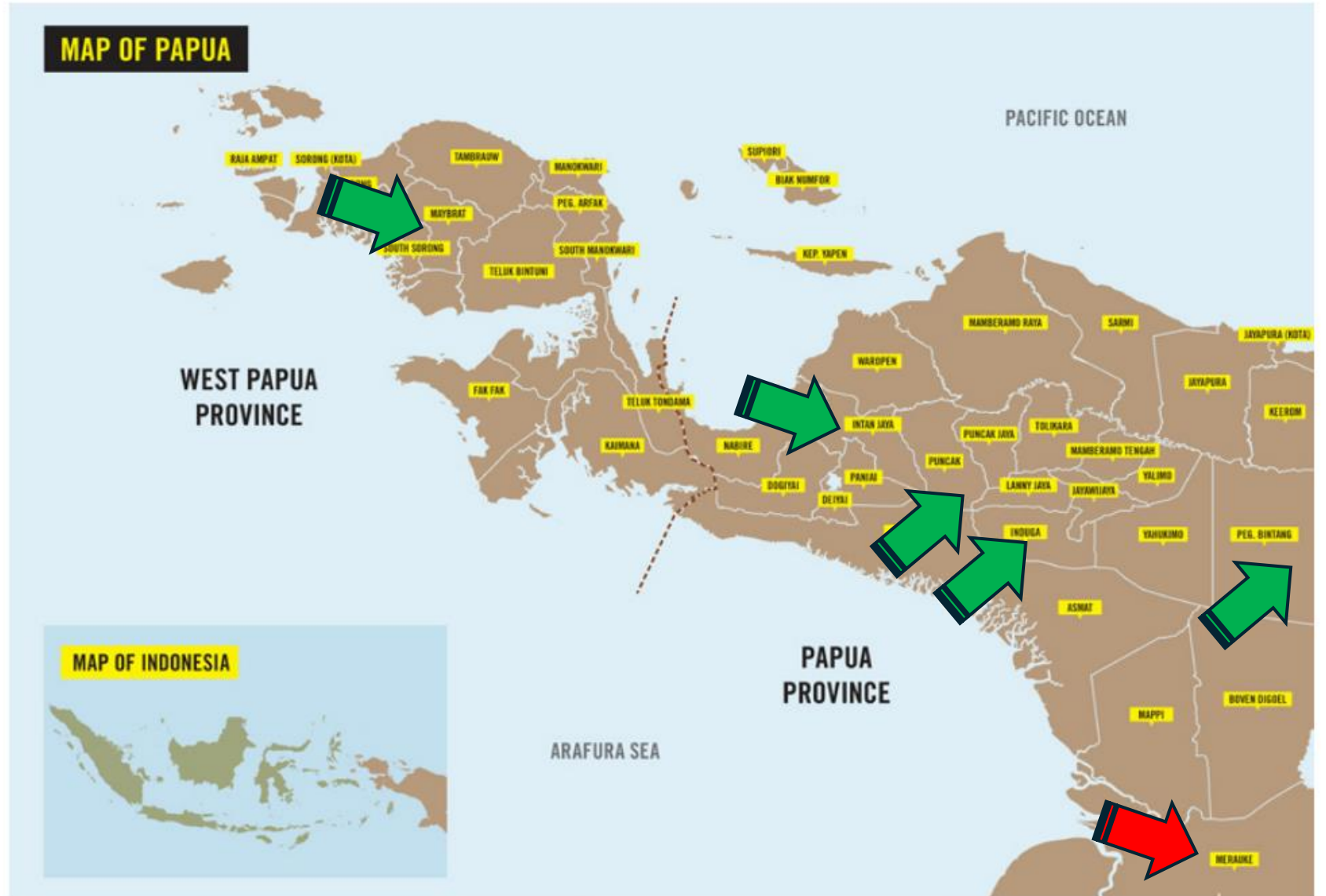


Membantu pelaksanaan program pemerintah di daerah.

Protected by the army

- Five new army battalions were established with specific tasks to protect the Food and Energy Project
- Two of them were stationed in the Southern Papua Province where the Food and Energy Project is located

Is Merauke in a conflict zone?



What is armed conflict? *Tadic* *formula*

“a de facto state of hostilities dependent on neither a declaration nor recognition of the existence of “war” by its parties” (ICRC 2024)

“an armed conflict exists whenever there is a resort to armed force between States or protracted armed violence between governmental authorities and organized armed groups or between such groups within a State”

(ICTY, the *Tadic* appeal decision para. 70)

When is it applicable?

“This criterion applies to **all conflicts whether international or internal**. It is not necessary to establish the existence of an armed conflict within each municipality concerned. **It suffices to establish the existence of the conflict within the whole region** of which the municipalities are a part.”

(ICTY, the *Tadic* appeal decision para. 70)

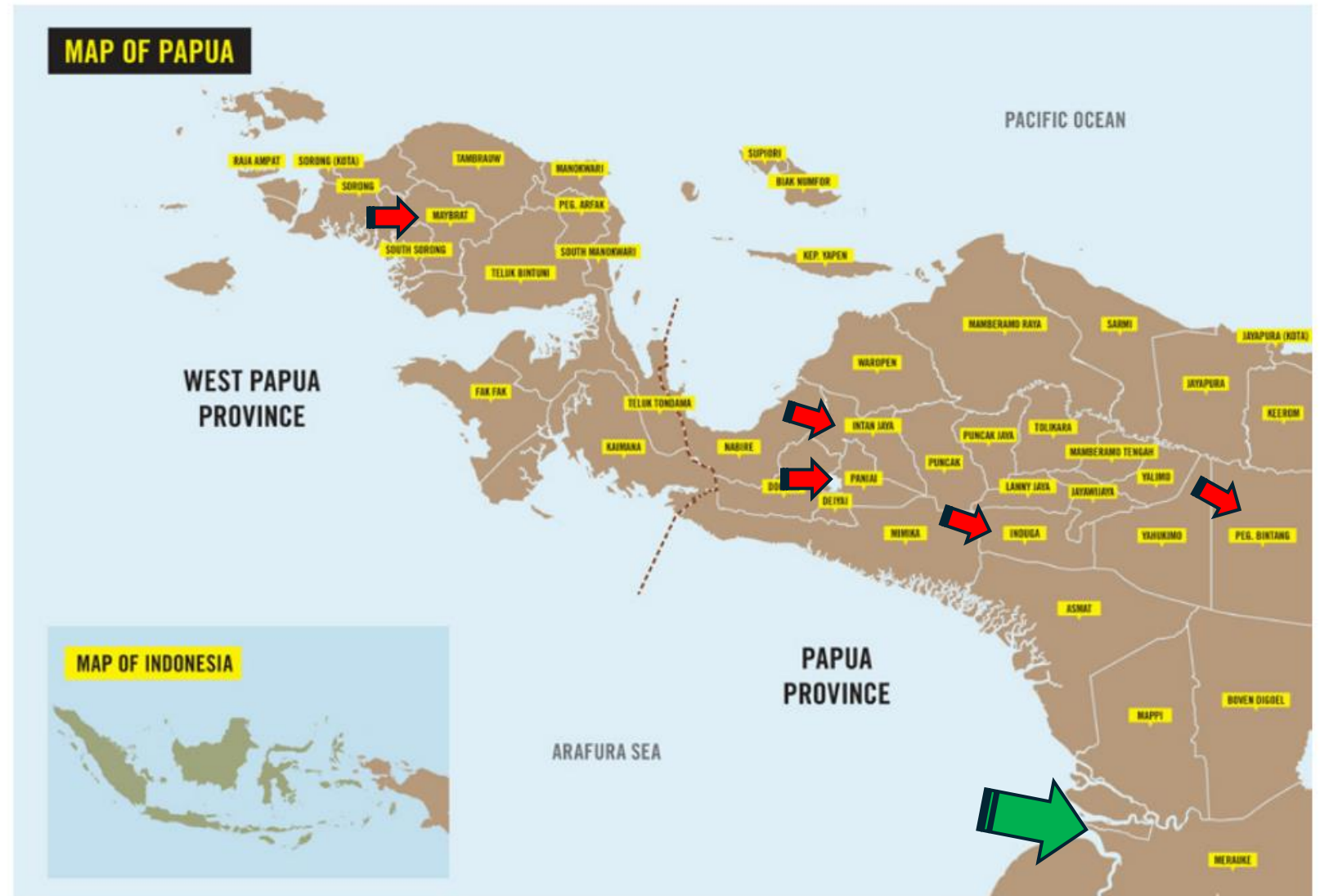
Applicability of International Humanitarian Law

“Like the Appeals Chamber, the Trial Chamber asserts that:

International humanitarian law applies from the **initiation** of such armed conflicts and **extends beyond the cessation of hostilities** until a general conclusion of peace is reached; or, in the case of internal conflicts, **a peaceful settlement is achieved** . Until that moment, international humanitarian law continues to apply in the whole territory of the warring States or, in the case of internal conflicts, the whole territory under the control of a party, **whether or not actual combat takes place there.**” (ICTY, the *Tadic* appeal decision para. 70)

Reality of armed conflict:

- Nduga (2018)
- Intan Jaya (2019)
- Maybrat (2020)
- Pegunungan Bintang (2021)
- Paniai (2024)



- History of military operation: 16 military operation from 1966-2000
- NO official policy of GOI regarding the military deployment to Papua under Law 34/2000 regarding TNI
- What we have are internal TNI policies treated as if they were GOI's policies because there never a correction to it.

Armed violence statistics in West Papua between 2017 and 2022

ARMED VIOLENCE IN WEST PAPUA	ARMED CLASHES IN WEST PAPUA					
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Number of armed clashes/ attacks	24	44	33	64	85	72
Number of casualties among security forces	3	8	18	11	18	19
Number of injured security forces	8	15	12	10	34	29
Number of casualties among TPN-PB fighters	2	12	14	14	24	8
Number of injured TPN-PB fighters	2	4	0	1	8	1
Total number of casualties among civilians during armed clashes or raids	3	42	20	27	28	43
Number of civilians killed by security force members	0	17	13	20	12	5
Number of civilians killed by TPN-PB fighters	3	25	7	7	14	38
Number of killed civilians (perpetrators unclear)	0	0	0	0	2	0
Number of victims who died during armed conflict due to consequences of internal displacement	0	20	196	186	745	
Total number of injured civilians	12	15	9	26	20	21
Number of civilians injured by security force members	9	7	9	10	7	2
Number civilians injured by TPN-PB fighters	3	8	0	16	13	19

(The conflict statistics are based on reports,¹⁴ media releases, news articles, and information collected by churches and human rights defenders)

Source: Human Rights Monitor 2023



The Marind are not numbers

“*Kaya-Kaya* (the Marind) is optimistic in nature. They hold the view that life is very delightful instead of worrying. They are happy with their world and particularly, with themselves. Their happiness sometimes is so abundant and candid, as long as their fear of magic which overshadows them do not destroy their lives” (Vertenten 1935: 8, *my translation*).

- “Their land is not full of honey and milk. Milk? Gosh! How come the dignified humans are interested in drinking milk from beast? Honey is the general intake for them. But their land is rich of coconut and oil, isn’t it? Where do sago trees grow more to fulfill the daily need other than in the Marind land? In their land, they have bananas, sugarcane, sweet potatoes, taro, breadfruit, and so on....Food are abundant [and can be grabbed] only with little effort” (Vertenten 1935: 9, *my translation*).

How do they resist?

1. Symbolisms: crucifix & *sasi adat* (blockade)
2. Human rights mechanisms: national and international
3. Environmental issues
4. Indigenous Peoples issues: national and international
5. Rights of traditional occupation



**“The philosophers
have only *interpreted*
the world, in various
ways. The point,
however, is to *change*
it.**

(Karl Marx, [Eleven Theses on Feuerbach](#))

