

Defender Democracy Award

Your Excellencies, distinguished parliamentarians, friends and partners,

It is an honor to be with you tonight at the Defender of Democracy Award ceremony not in person but in spirit to accept this award. I wish I have attended this ceremony in person but due to circumstances beyond our control I am not able to be with you today. However, I am humbled to receive this recognition from the Parliamentarians for Global Action, an organization that has, for decades, championed human rights, democracy, and the rule of law across the world.

This is the third major recognition I have received in my career:

- Bob Brown Foundation Environmental Award (2021) – for defending ecosystems and frontline communities.
- Digicel Foundation Men of Honour Award (2023) – for leadership grounded in community service and peace building.
- Defender of Democracy Award (2026) – for advancing human rights, democracy, and environmental justice on the global stage.

Each award marks a chapter of the same story: the struggle to protect people, land, and democracy from forces that seek to exploit them.

This award is not mine alone. It belongs to the people and communities of Papua New Guinea who continue to defend their land, their rights, and their dignity in the face of immense challenges.

From environmental protection to human rights advocacy, from strengthening democratic participation and protecting our customary land, my journey has always been rooted in one truth: our people deserve a future where development is fair, consent is genuine, and justice is accessible to all.

Thank you for this opportunity

I am here on behalf of the millions of people who live with the sea, who see the sea as their mother, their provider, their healer and more, and those who see the sea as a friend to play with I come from New Ireland Province in Papua New Guinea., My people are some of those people. Papua New Guinea is an island so a large population depend on the sea for their survival. Since 2011, when we first heard of seabed mining, our first thought was what will happen to us? To our reefs? Our fish?

Solwara 1 is only a few nautical miles from us. It is in our fishing and cultural ground. We successfully paused any development work on this mining tenement since 2011 but the hunger for critical minerals is so huge different mining companies have been sneaking in and out.

In 2024 our Prime Minister announced a moratorium stopping the issuance of any new permit for deep seabed mining. However, while this decision is in place extractors have come and gone so we are not sleeping. We are watching to ensure our see is safe, and in turn we are safe.

We are aware that the rush is real and we are watching.

I thank you for this opportunity to say that deep seabed mining will not benefit us the people of the sea. We have seen how mineral extraction has harmed rivers and mountains on land and how they have forced populations of humans and fauna to be displaced. In PNG it is not easy to pick up a group

of people from one land area and drop them on another. It always creates a lot of unsolvable problems.

That is why we maintain a strong NO to deep seabed mining. We advocate and call for the Protection of the Ocean, Our Ocean by promoting United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 14 (**UNSDG 14**)

I thank Parliamentarians for Global Action for this honor, and I look forward to deepening our collaboration. Together, we can build societies that are more just, more inclusive, and more sustainable.

To my people here in PNG: this award is for you. This award is for my people, the network I work with and all those who believe in co-existing with the environment including our sea.

I am grateful for this award. I will use it to continue to work with my people to protect our part of the sea. I appeal to you and us all to please practice more care and compassion for our seas and our environment.

One of the **MOST IMPORTANT LESSONS** I learnt from my work is the use of media in disseminating information. Let the truth be the weapon of Democracy. Today's society is facing a lot of challenges because truth and honesty is missing. Disinformation and lies kills Democracy.

We must all advocate for truth and that peace and harmony comes when truth is spread in our society.

Thank you, and may God bless us all.

Note on Jonathan

Mr Jonathan Mesulam is a Papua New Guinean environmental activist. As a teacher he is helping his communities understand the dangers of mining in their environment. This will be his third award.