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War Profiteer of the Month:

Merauke Integrated Food & Energy Estate (MIFEE)

- A Food Project Invasion in [West Papua](#)

18 Mar 2011 — javier

Rosa Moiwend

Background



Papua is the western half of New Guinea, the world's second largest island, located about 200 km from the north of Australia. When the Dutch colonised this territory, it called it [Dutch New Guinea](#). The name of this territory has changed over time according to its political status. The Papuan political leaders then changed the name of Dutch New Guinea to West Papua when they prepared for the self-government of this territory in 1961. As soon as the Dutch left in 1962, Indonesia took over the territory, and then West Papua became one of the Indonesian provinces, called Irian Jaya. In 1999, the demand for independence from Papuans increased. In 2001 the [Indonesian government](#) granted a Special Autonomy status for Papua under law number 21, and accepted the original name of Papua. Yet, the autonomous status does not mean self-government. All development policies are still under the control of Jakarta, including the policy over investment in natural resources. Moreover, Papua is the only province of Indonesia which it is still identified as a conflict zone under the national defence policy after East Timor became an independent country in 1999 and after Aceh Province signed a Peace Agreement in 2008.

After nine years of Special Autonomy, Papuans realised that this status does not provide significant changes in many aspects of their life. Moreover, the Indonesian government controls the regulation of investment in

natural resources by opening easy access for multinational companies to exploit the abundant minerals and forests. Some multinational corporations such as [Freeport McMoran](#), a US giant mining company, plan long-term investment and spend huge amounts of money on security using Indonesian military from the Special Forces (Kopassus) and police. The UK/US company BP and some Korean and Chinese companies, are on the list of investors as well. The Indonesian government through its programme to save energy and deal with the world food crisis plans to open up a massive area of land in the southern part of Papua with a mega-project on food and bio-energy called MIFEE (Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate). Since the demand for independence and the various demands for indigenous people's rights cause opposition to the investors, the government uses a military approach as the only way to stop the conflict. After Freeport McMoran, MIFEE would be the next disaster for Papua. This article will portray a small part of the struggle over Food and [Bio Energy](#) project in Papua.

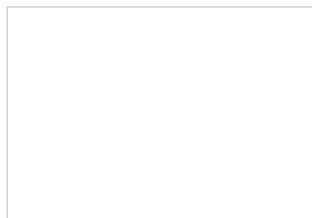
Malind, one of the indigenous communities in Merauke

Merauke is the southern part of Papua, covered by swampy forest with many rivers flowing down, mixed with massive savannah. The ecosystem in this region is unique. According to WWF, Merauke is one of the important places in the New Guinea Trans Fly Eco-region with its abundant bio-diversity.

Local tribes who have been living in the region are the Malind, Muyu and Mandobo, as well as Mappi and Auyu. The Malin tribe is one of the tribes most affected by the Food and Energy project. Some missionaries and anthropologists such as EB Savage from London Missionary Society, AC Haddon and Van Baal from the Netherlands, wrote in the early of 19th century about the Malind people in the region¹. Malind people identify themselves according to their Dema (ancestors). They believe that some places in Merauke are sacred, as Demas had visited that place on their journey. More than that, they believe that ancestors live there so they should protect that place and give their respect to it. If they disobey, they will get a customary sanction which bring bad things in their lives. These beliefs are transferred from generation to generation. Malind recognised each other according to the symbols of clans. There are six big clans with their own symbols; Gebze with coconut, Mahuze with the sagoo palm, Basik with a pig, Samkakai with a kangaroo, Kaize with a cassowary and Balagaise with a falcon bird. These symbols integrated with the customary rules that control and influence their lives. Losing one of the symbols in nature means losing their identity.

Malind people have their own mechanism for using their natural resources. Each clan has its own customary territory that functions as a hunting place, for gardening, as a fishing ground, and to settle. Each place has a boundary that doesn'tt appear on the government map of land rights. All explanations and knowledge of customary matters are found in their customary law. If the sacred places and boundaries are lost, it means that internal conflict between clans might happen. This is the reason for the importance of keeping the customary boundaries and sacred places.

Merauke Food and Energy Estate (MIFEE)



In 2009, when a food and energy crisis hit the world in connection with global warming, the Indonesian President, [Susilo Bambang Yudhono](#), declared his goal of feeding "Indonesia and the world" by developing a food and energy estate in Merauke, Papua. As a mean of stabilising the security of Indonesia's food, the project - called Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate, or MIFEE — covers 1.6 million hectares of commercial plantations. Merauke has been designated a national Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in order to attract the \$8.6 billion of investment needed for the project. MIFEE is one of the priority programmes of the second term of his presidency (2009 to 2014).

To fulfill its ambition, the government of Indonesia has invited multinational companies from the Middle East, Asia, and the US, as well as from Indonesia. More than 30 companies confirmed their interest in this project and have already received concessions from the Indonesian government. Some, such as the [Bin Laden Group](#) from Saudi Arabia, announced their interest in spending 43 million dollars for 500,000 hectares of land on rice fields in Merauke. Then it was followed by some other companies from Qatar, Oman and the United Arab Emirates who also want to invest in agribusiness in Indonesia². International Paper, based in Memphis, Tennessee, is also reported to have had exploratory talks with the Indonesian minister of forestry concerning developing a mill either in Kalimantan or in Merauke³. From Asia, a Japanese Corporation, the [Mitsubishi group](#), the Wilmar group from Singapore, and LG International from Korea, also made commitments to this project though a joint venture with Indonesian companies. Companies such as Medco Group, owned by Arifin Panigoro; Artha Graha Network, owned by Tomy Winata; PT Bangun Cipta Sarana, owned by Siswono Yudhohusodo; Comexindo International, owned by Hasyim Djojohadikusumo; Sumber Alam Sutra; Korindo; PT Rajawali Nusantara Indonesia; Sinar Mas; PT Kertas Nusantara; PT Digul Agro Lestari as part of Astra Agro Lestari, and Sinar Mas Group⁴ are the Indonesian partners of these multinational companies. As well as investing in food plantations, many of them are interested in industrial timber plantation and cheap production.

MEDCO Group vs Malind

Medco International is an integrated corporation that invests in oil, gas, mining and energy sectors across Asia, Africa, and the US. It has 8 production blocks in the US and the Gulf of Mexico, 2 exploration blocks in Yemen, 2 blocks in Cambodia, 1 block in Tunisia, and 1 in Libya¹. According to The Jakarta Post, Hilmi Panigoro, the presidential commissioner, stated that Medco Energy International will collaborate with the Libyan Investment Authority (LIA) for US\$ 400 million investment on an oil facility in Libya. The investment will be shared fifty-fifty with LIA.² In Indonesia, Medco Energy owns 10 blocks in total in Sumatra, Java, Kalimantan and Sulawesi.

In order to spread out its business, Medco Energy particularly shows an interest in bio-fuel and bio-energy. In Sumatra (Lampung), Medco is spending US\$ 45 million for 13,000 hectares of Cassava plantations. Then in Merauke, Papua, Medco is investing in 170,000 hectares for an industrial timber plantation. MIFEE has one of its priorities as energy investment. It has been planning to operate using a similar model of corporate farming as in Brazil. According to Hilmi Panigoro, Brazil is a successful model of an integrated agriculture project regarding energy and food security. Panigoro said Brazil has switched 50% of its fuel consumption from only 1% of its fertile land. Moreover, he quotes the studies of the FAO in 2005 that suggested Indonesia has more potential for developing bio-energy than Brazil. ³

Medco has strong support from the Indonesian government and the local authorities in Merauke. Without consulting with the Malind people, the Indonesian government, with help from the local government, has split opinions in the area about forestry and agriculture.

In September 2009, LG International announced its partnership with Medco Group to obtain 1 million hectares of Papua's forests for wood chips. For that reason, the Korean corporation spent about US\$ 25 million on 25% of PT Metra Duta Lestari (Medco Group), with another 66% held by Medco.⁴

Local independent media, Jubi online, reported complaints from the Malind tribes' leader Alberth Onoka Gebze Moiwend, in Merauke, about Medco's activities. Alberth explained that Medco's forest clearance was destroying hunting places, and firewood and food grounds of the Malind tribes who live in Bupu village. In addition, wastes from Medco's pulp factory in Bupu village is polluting the river, which is the only water supply for the village. Yet Medco Group refuses to say that its activity affects deforestation. The company, is already producing large amounts of timber from natural forests, and has shipped several barges, mostly of acacia and eucalyptus trees for chips in Merauke. All the land will be cleared and then replanted with other seedlings of commercial timber. Moreover, Onoka Moiwend asserted that Medco activities could potentially bring the indigenous people in Merauke towards slow extermination.

The Malin people in Kaliki, a small village near the town, are waiting for their compensation from Medco. According to the local church, the PT Medco Papua (PT Medco) company entered Kaliki village in 2008 and promised to pay compensation to five clans (Mahuze, Kaize, Balagaize, Gebze, and Ndiken) who own the land. On 3 March, 2008, they organised a meeting with villagers. PT Medco promised to give them compensation for the use of land with 10 motorbikes for the Gebze family, who owned most of the land; and they promised to build houses for the villagers. Additionally, the company would provide each villager with their own bank account and provide a school and houses for the teachers. Also, there would be guaranteed scholarships and dormitory costs for children of Kaliki who continued their studies in the city. The company would facilitate a new road to Kaliki as well. Medco would provide jobs for villagers in order to improve their economic situation.

Nevertheless, the company created internal conflicts between clans in the village by signing an agreement with only the other four clans. In the meantime, Medco made another agreement with the Gebze clan who agreed to sell 20 hectares of their land with only a payment of 20 Million Rupiahs (approximately £1500). The four other clans complained to the company and the Gebze. Misunderstandings between those clans finally led to one of the Gebze members being a victim of a black magic practice that cause his death. Villagers and Gebze families believed that the black magic was sent by people from the other clans. For that reason, the clans are fighting against each other while the company continues to run its project. Just recently, the local church took an initiative to mediate between the Gebze and other clans to resolve their conflict. Finally, the villagers have decided to reject PT Medco and its activities in Kailiki.

It has been reported that there has been strong rejection of MIFEE by local people. Solidarity groups called SORPATOM and KOMALI have formed a resistance alliance. Protests and demonstrations had been organised by these groups. Furthermore, the customary leaders in Merauke wrote a letter of rejection to MIFEE and sent it to the UN Special Rapporteur for Indigenous People was facilitated by AMAN (The Indigenous People's Alliance of Archipelago), the main Indonesian Indigenous People's forum. AMAM delivered a statement of concern about human rights in Merauke in connection with the MIFEE project to the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in New York, in April, 2010. AMAN in its statement categorises the MIFEE project as "a structural and systematic genocide of the West Papuan people" this was endorsed by 24 indigenous people's organisations around the world⁵. The rejection of MIFEE has now gained big support from different organisations in Indonesia and Papua, and internationally as well.

The case of Kaliki is only one of many cases that have happened in the region. Not only Medco, but also some 30 other companies cause problems for the indigenous people there. However, the Indonesian government stays quiet and continues its interest in this mega-food project. At the local government level, Merauke recently had a new head of authority who has a different perspective on this food project. Romanus Mbaraka, the new head has decided to postpone operating this project under the local legislation. However, he has no

authority to influence national investment policy.

The question is for how long the indigenous people in Papua will resist the bombardment of investments threatening their existence in their ancestors' land.

Notes

- 1) "A Small Paradise will be Annihilated", an article by Rosa Biwangko Moiwend, published in tabloid Suara Perempuan Papua (local newspaper) 2010.
- 2) www.gatra.com/2008-08-12/artikel.
- 3) Down to Earth No. 78, August 2008, page 2, Merauke mega-project raises food fears.
- 4) Bisnis International, No. 63/Vol. IX, 2000, hal. 30-40; Agrina, No. 100, Vol. 4, 1-14 April 2009; Globe Asia, Sept. 2008, hal. 62).
- 5) 9M10 Investor's update, November 2010 at www.medcoenergi.com
- 6) The Jakarta Post, 11 March 2010
- 7) Public Discussion on MIFEE, Kompas Jakarta, 10 April 2009
- 8) http://www.lgicorp.com/jsp/eng/ir/ir_news/news_view.jsp?txtGubun=Q&txtSe...
- 9) <http://papaforesteye.blogspot.com/2010/05/statement-to-un-on-human-righ...>

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MIFEE project? No problem, says senior official.

JUBI, 6 September 2010

The secretary of the Agriculture and Food Sustainability Service for the province of Papua, Ricky Wowor said that, unlike reports that have been made, there are no problems surrounding the Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate project.

'We have not heard of any problems with MIFEE which means that the people accept it,' he said.

According to PP 26/2008 on the National Allocation Plan which was signed into law by the Indonesian

president on 10 March 2008, the land for MIFEE has been designated as a major agricultural region. The MIFEE project will support the government's programme by transforming Merauke into a national rice granary. The project will cover an area of 1.16 million hectares.

However, this project is regarded as a threat to the sustainability of the forests because 90.2 percent of the 1.28 million ha (sic) of land is covered with virgin forest.

According to a statement last August by the Dewan Adat Papua, Merauke branch, this programme is a failure and is opposed by the indigenous community. It is ironic that the Agriculture and Food Sustainability Service is unaware of this.

However, Wowor said: 'This is a programme of the district administration. We are waiting for reports from below.'

MIFEE will be run by Medco Papua, Artha Graha, Bangun Tjipta, Comexindo International, Medco Group, Digul Agro Lestari and Klinik Argopolitan Gorontalo.

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Bintang Papua, 23 August 2010
Abridged in translation

Ardiansyah murder repercussions

Journalists to boycott police news

About one hundred print and electronic journalists, following a demonstration in Jayapura, announced their decision to boycott all news from the police as from 23 August for failing to reveal the perpetrator of the murder of Metro TV journalist, Ardiansyah Matra'is whose body was found on 28 July floating in the Maro River.

They also called for the chief of police in Papua to be dismissed for his failure to thoroughly investigate the journalist's murder.

Victor Mambor, the chairman of the journalists organisation AJI, said they had waited for hours to meet the police chief but he never appeared.

According to the results of an autopsy by the police, there were many swellings on the journalist's body, several teeth were missing and his neck showed signs of his having been strangled. At the time of the tragic incident, other journalists had been receiving terror threats by SMS. [Other reports suggest that Ardiansyah was still alive when he was thrown into the river where he drowned.]

During the demonstration, the journalists carried banners calling for an end to the terror. A journalist from Tempo said it was up to the police to investigate the case.

'Today, our colleague is murdered. Tomorrow it could be one of us,' he said.

Cenderawasih reporter Ronald Manurung said: 'We are partners of the police. Every day we report about police activities in safeguarding security in Papua, but the chief of police doesn't show any interest in the sufferings of our colleague and his grieving family.'

At this point, a police official appeared and said the demonstrators should delegate someone to meet the chief of police but this was rejected.

Then another journalist, Cunding Levi read a joint statement setting a deadline for the police to show results in their investigation to discover the perpetrator of Ardiansyah's murder. The statement will be sent to the president and other ministers as well as the National Human Rights Commission, whose deputy chairman Matius Murib was present. He invited those present to bow their heads in tribute to their murdered colleague. All sections of the community in Papua should pay close attention to the human rights cases in Papua, he said. Thereafter, the journalist dispersed in an orderly fashion

Bintang Papua, 23 August 2010

Alcoholic drinks and the increase in HIV in Papua
With the number of HIV/AIDS sufferers in Papua continuing to increase, the Papuan provincial government has announced its intention to restrict or to stop the sale of alcoholic drinks throughout the province of Papua. The number of sufferers in Papua reportedly reached a total of more than 5,000 in 2009.

Provincial governor Barnabas Suebu said that during a two-month tour of many kampungs, many people had urged the government to pay more attention to this problem. 'So we have now drafted a regulation to end the sale of alcohol which will soon be submitted to the DPRP.'

The governor said that the alarming rise in the number of HIV sufferers was a warning to Papuans that this sickness must be brought under control..

Bintang Papua, 23 August 2010
Special market for women traders to be built

The Papuan provincial government has said that it is still committed to the plan to build a special market for women traders. A spokesman said that a location had been chosen and once the legalities of the conversion of the land are completed, construction would begin.

The spokesman Jansen Monim said this was an example of the governor's determination to listen to the wishes of the people.

For the past nine years, Papuan women traders have been pressing for a special market but as yet, their demands have not been realised and they have been pushed from one location to another, having to do their business under the open sky and sitting on the bare ground. During the course of their struggle, some of the women have died.

One location that was offered to the women was rejected because, they said, it was too far away from people coming to buy things. After submitting their demands to the governor, he has now promised that the special market for women traders will be built in 2010. The governor also promised to provide other facilities for the women traders. There are also plans to provide the women with special training for marketing management and to supply four trucks along with fuel to help transport their goods.

It was also said that the governor's commitment applies not only to Jayapura but to the whole of Papua.

[Comment: The reference throughout this item was only to Papua, meaning that this pledge does not apply to the province of West Papua.]

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TAPOL and DTE press release

Journalist's death overshadows launch of Papua food project

11 August 2010 – The death of a local journalist has increased concerns about a giant food estate launched today in Merauke, Southeastern Papua by Indonesia's Minister of Agriculture.

TAPOL and Down to Earth, the International Campaign for Ecological Justice in Indonesia are calling for a moratorium on the food project, known as MIFEE (Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate) until independent assessments of the political, economic, socio-cultural, environmental and gender impacts of the project have been undertaken.

The suspicious death of the journalist, Ardiansyah Matra'is, in late July, following threats against him, has been linked to his coverage of this week's local elections for the district head in Merauke.

Other journalists have also been threatened in what appears to have been a concerted campaign to stifle free expression ahead of the elections. Current district head, Johannes Gluba-Gebze, has been instrumental in planning and promoting the food project.

"The potential adverse impacts of MIFEE for the local population are massive such that full transparency and accountability are required. A free media is essential to ensuring effective democratic oversight of the

project,” say TAPOL and Down to Earth who are closely monitoring the project.

“President Susilo Bambang Yudhono’s ambition to ‘feed Indonesia then feed the world’ may come at the expense of many Papuans, and could add to wider frustrations about the lack of political, social and economic autonomy in Papua,” they add.

The project is likely to contribute to the marginalisation of indigenous Papuans by taking over the customary-owned land and resources which provide their livelihoods. It is also likely to exacerbate existing human rights grievances, and accelerate environmental deforestation and degradation.

“The enhanced security presence likely to be associated with MIFEE will increase tensions and add to the vulnerability of Merauke’s inhabitants, especially as Indonesia’s notorious Kopassus special forces are active in the area”, warn TAPOL and Down to Earth.

Background and issues

MIFEE is a collection of commercial plantations, planned to cover 1.6 million hectares. The project is being promoted as a means of stabilizing Indonesia’s food security. It has received support from the Government of Indonesia, and Merauke has been designated a national ‘Special Economic Zone’ (SEZ) in order to attract the US\$8.6 billion of investment needed for the project. Over 30 investors from Indonesia, Japan, China, Singapore, Korea and the Middle East have expressed an interest in MIFEE,[1] Their involvement appears to be part of a global trend to make money by buying up lands abroad for food production.

Tens of thousands more workers and economic migrants, mostly from outside Papua, are expected to settle in Merauke and the surrounding areas. The indigenous people of Merauke have already felt the impact of transmigration programmes, first implemented under Dutch colonial rule and continued under Indonesia’s Suharto regime. Population growth, changes in population demographics and the further loss of land and resources as a result of MIFEE could have a devastating and irreversible impact on the livelihoods of the local population, especially indigenous Papuans.

The huge number of newcomers may strain Merauke’s underdeveloped services and further marginalise an already minority indigenous population. The commercialisation of land and takeover of indigenous Papuans’ land will affect the livelihoods of Papuans and could prevent the transfer of knowledge, culture and language from one generation to the next.

Sustained local knowledge of tribal boundaries, land rights, land use, customary law and taboos are all dependent on having access to land and respect for traditional rights over the land. If MIFEE goes ahead, indigenous people will be faced with new boundaries and non-traditional crops such as oil palm, rice, sugar cane, corn and soyabean.

There has been strong opposition to MIFEE from local NGOs such as SKP-KAM, FokerLSM, SORPATOM and AMAN.[2] However, the death of Ardiansyah Matra’is and campaign of terror against journalists have closed down the space for criticism. These groups have emphasised on-going concerns about targeted surveillance and intimidation of NGOs and journalists. In 2009, a joint report by the Indonesian environmental NGO Telapak and the UK’s Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) stated that ‘irregular groups allied to [Johannes Gluba] Gebze’ operate in Merauke and ‘work in unison with the state security forces to monitor and intimidate any dissenters in the region.’

The security strategy for MIFEE is unclear, as is the resulting direct and indirect impact on the local population. Merauke is located near the Indonesia-Papua New Guinea (PNG) border and is already a highly militarized area. A 2009 Human Rights Watch report details abuses committed by Kopassus, who have close ties with Gebze.

In other parts of Papua where natural resources are being exploited, state security forces are routinely employed to protect commercial assets. There has often been an expansion in these areas of the sex and alcohol industries, which are run by migrants or the police and military themselves. The potential impact on the population’s health is made clear by FokerLSM which reports that Merauke has the highest number of HIV/AIDS cases after Mimika district, where the giant mining company Freeport operates.

The scale of MIFEE raises major environmental and ecological concerns. The conversion of protected forest for agricultural use seems likely, despite both Indonesia’s Forestry Minister and the Coordinating Minister for the Economy stating otherwise.

Widespread licensed deforestation in Merauke would contradict the Government of Indonesia’s commitment to reduce green-house gas emissions by 26% by 2020. It also raises questions over a recent billion dollar REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) agreement with the Government of Norway to preserve Indonesia’s rainforests, in particular in Papua.

ENDS

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[1] Medco Group; Artha Graha Network; PT Bangun Cipta Sarana; Comexindo International; Sumber Alam Sutra; Korindo; PT Rajawali Nusantara Indonesia; Sinar Mas; PT Kertas Nusantara; Mitsubishi (Japan); Wilmar

(Singapore); LG International (Korea).

[2] Office for Justice and Peace of the Archdiocese of Merauke (SKP-KAM); Papua NGOs Cooperation Forum (FokerLSM); Solidarity for Papuans (SORPATOM); The Indigenous People's Alliance of Indonesia (AMAN)

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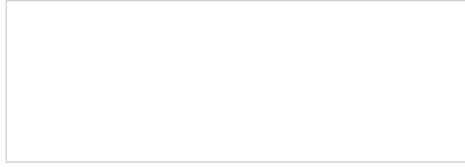
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November 2015

M T W T F S S

1

2 [3](#) 4 5 [6](#) [7](#) [8](#)

9 10 11 12 13 14 15

16 17 18 19 20 21 22

23 24 25 26 27 28 29

30

[« Oct](#)

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