PARADISE SILENCED

A Visual Journey Capturing the Resilience of West Papuans







IN MEMORIAM

Suzanne Mijnssen 1925 – 2024

Whose concern and support for West Papua's forests endures through her generosity.

Mist over primary forest near the Digul River in south-eastern West Papua. (31/03/2018). Ulet Ifansasti

FOREWORD

'There lies my cherished island. Land of Papua, isle of beauty. Your forests and seas, forever hushed. Golden bird-of-paradise.'

The song 'Tanah Papua' depicts West Papua, a paradise making up the western half of the island of New Guinea. The song evokes West Papua's towering mountains capped with a sparkling touch of glacier ice, the maritime riches of the Coral Triangle, the majestic river valleys and beautiful lakes, and the forests that are home to a cornucopia of distinctive plants and animals.

Hundreds of years ago, it may have seemed that West Papua would forever remain untouched by the outside world. However, driven by the march of technology, an influx of population, and greed for natural resources, this land is now threatened by economic interests. Forests, valleys and savannah, which are not only sanctuaries for wildlife but also the homelands of hundreds of distinct Indigenous peoples, are now being cleared in the name of development.

For more than a decade, Greenpeace Indonesia has been working in West Papua, not only campaigning to save the forests, but documenting its natural beauty and helping build the capacity of Indigenous communities to defend against external threats to their land rights. At the same time, Greenpeace has witnessed the destruction that is tearing apart the last bastion of rainforest in Indonesia. Slowly but surely, forests in West Papua are being cleared from Raja Ampat to Merauke. If this extractive, land-hungry clearing model is not halted immediately, West Papua will likely suffer the same fate as Sumatra and Kalimantan, whose forests have almost vanished.

Defending West Papua's forests means preserving Mother Nature, the home of Indigenous West Papuans who have inhabited the Land of the Bird-of-Paradise since time immemorial.

Kiki Taufik

Greenpeace Global Head of Indonesia Forest Campaign







'Diverse and wondrous' is the phrase that best describes West Papua. The diversity of Papua is reflected in its abundant life, mesmerizing beauty, the rich imagination of those who bear different and complex cultures, and its status as a treasure gifted to humanity by the universe. The island of New Guinea is the second largest island in the world, after Greenland. The island is divided into two parts: The island is divided into two parts: the western portion, known as West Papua, belongs to Indonesia, while the eastern portion is Papua New Guinea, which became an independent country in 1975. The island of New Guinea has the third-largest tropical forest in the world, after the Amazon and the Congo Basin. Its spectacular landscapes are a magnet for researchers, explorers and, more recently, investors.

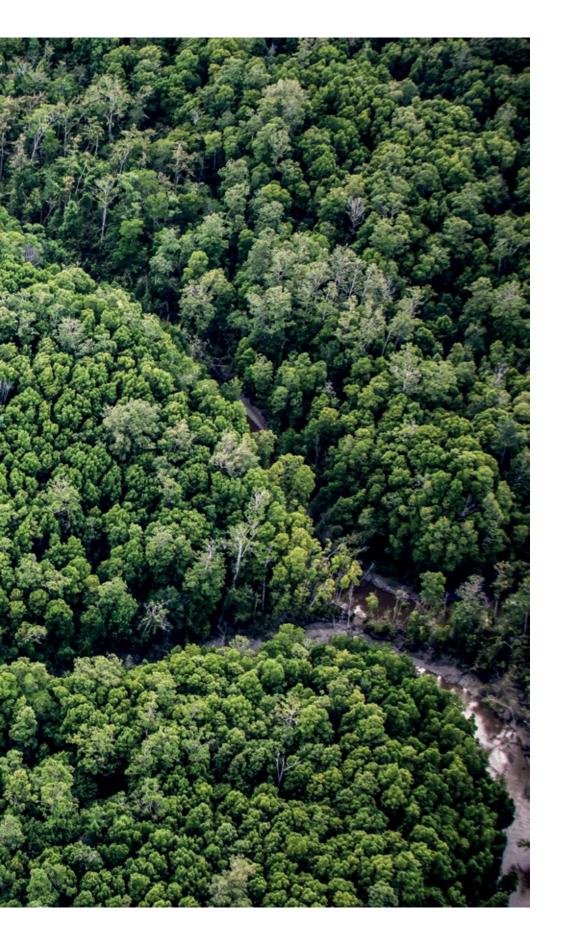
West Papua has a complete landscape, including mountains with tropical glaciers, rivers, lakes, valleys with grasslands, lowlands with vast mangrove forests, peninsulas, and coral reefs containing the highest diversity of coral species in the world.

In the past, some of the north and west coast of West Papua was associated with the Sultanate of Tidore in North Maluku, as they were within the claimed jurisdiction of the Sultan of Tidore. Etymologically, the name 'Papua' is thought to come from papo ua, which in the Tidore language means "not joined," "not united," or "not joined together." This referred to the geographical position of West Papua, which is distant from the centre of the Sultanate of Tidore and, therefore, was not considered part of the main sultanate's territory.

Another theory says the term 'Papua' comes from the Biak language, 'Sup i babwa', which became 'Papwa', and then 'Papua', meaning 'the land below the sunset', referring to the Raja Ampat islands. This theory aligns with 16th-century Portuguese and Spanish records that the word 'Papua' was already in use at that time to refer to the Raja Ampat islands and the Bird's Head region.

West Papua's identity has evolved further through a series of names, each marking a pivotal moment in its history. From Nieuw-Guinea under Dutch colonial rule (1898) to West Irian in 1962, when Indonesia assumed control under the New York Agreement, the territory's appearance in the eyes of the world was shaped by promises of self-determination and the contentious 1969 'act of free choice'. It was only in 2007 that the name Papua was adopted to cover the whole territory, resulting in the naming of Papua Province and West Papua Province, then in 2022, further subdivision to become six provinces. By then, the term 'Tanah Papua' (meaning the Land of Papua) had been popularised by West Papuans as a way to refer to the entire territory.





A heart-shaped river bend nestled in primary forest near Kimaam Island, in West Papua's southeastern corner. (26/03/2018). Ulet Ifansasti

Cultural Diversity

Experts estimate that there are around 250 local languages in West Papua, which are divided into two language families: Austronesian and non-Austronesian. The number of local languages also indicates the number of ethnicities. Austronesian language speakers are generally coastal communities (Biak, Waropen, Wandamen, Maya), while non-Austronesian languages (often called Papuan languages) are predominantly spoken by people who live in the interior or central part of Papua (Hubula, Asmat, Sentani, Muyu, Ekari, Maybrat).

Many different Indigenous peoples live from the coast to the mountains of West Papua. Based on cultural similarities, they are sometimes grouped into seven cultural zones: (1) Saireri: covering the northern coastal areas, such as Biak Numfor, Superiori, Yapen, and Waropen islands; (2) Tabi: encompassing Jayapura, Keerom, Sarmi, and Mamberamo Raya; (3) La Pago: including the eastern central mountain areas, such as Jayawijaya, Pegunungan Bintang, Lanny Jaya, Tolikara, Yahukimo, Nduga, Puncak Jaya, Yalimo, and Mamberamo Tengah; (4) Mee Pago: covering Nabire, Dogiyai, Deiyai, Paniai, Intan Jaya, and Mimika; (5) Bomberai: the region south of the Bird's Head, which includes Fak-fak, Kaimana, and Kokonau on the Mimika coast; (6) Anim-Ha: including the southern part of Papua, such as Merauke, Boven Digul, Asmat, and Mappi; and (7) Domberai: encompassing Manokwari, Bintuni, Babo, Wondama, Wasi, Sorong, Raja Ampat, Teminabuan, Inawatan, Ayamaru, Aifat, and Aitinyo.

Indigenous West Papuans have the extraordinary resilience required to adapt to the very diverse ecology and topography of New Guinea. Communities living in the interior (e.g., the Hubula, who are often referred to as 'Dani', a name used by Dutch colonial expeditions), tend to live in houses built in groups; as such they have complex kinship relationships.

Since the environment is unsuitable for farming, the Biak people have adapted by becoming traders and sailors. They have developed advanced navigational knowledge, also reflected in their expertise in boat building to support maritime life and trade. It is not surprising that in the past, the Biak people were able to reach and spread to other areas, such as the Raja Ampat Islands, the Bird's Head region, and Halmahera.

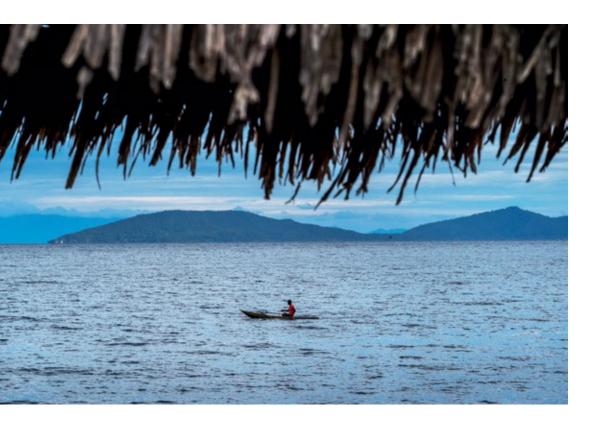
Pigs kept as livestock are a common sight in the highlands of West Papua. (8/08/2022). Jurnasyanto Sukarno





Awyu people gather in Kowo village, Boven Digoel for a ceremony to defend their ancestral lands. (24/06/2023). Jurnasyanto Sukarno







Fishing by boat offshore from Saporkren village. (17/08/2022).

Jurnasyanto Sukarno



Canoes are the best means of transport for many people living in the lowlands, seen here at Kowo village, Boven Digoel. (24/06/2023).

Jurnasyanto Sukarno





A breathtaking view of the Sembra River, surrounded by the lush greenery of the rainforest of Knasaimos region in South Sorong. (15/03/2018). Jurnasyanto Sukarno

Hubula people pose for a photo with the mummy of their war commander, Wim Motok Mabel, in Yiwika village in the Baliem Valley. According to Wim's descendants, the mummy is 288 years old. (10/08/2022). Jurnasyanto Sukarno









The Maoke Mountains, as seen from within Lorentz National Park. (11/08/2022). Jurnasyanto Sukarno



A beautiful sunset over the Grime Nawa Valley, captured from Berab, Nimbokrang. (4/07/2022). Jurnasyanto Sukarno

Essential Knowledge and Expertise

Indigenous West Papuans possess a deep knowledge of seasons, climate, food processing, ecological zones, and medicinal plants, as well as a range of life-sustaining skills and expertise. Their knowledge and skill systems have evolved in tandem with their responsiveness to the harsh and challenging natural environment. These varying natural conditions encourage the development of expertise and skills that tend to be unique to a region.

In coastal areas where sago grows naturally, such as the coasts of Kaimana, Timika, Yahukimo, Asmat, and Merauke; Fakfak, Teluk Bintuni, Sorong, Raja Ampat, Tambrauw, and Manokwari; as well as Nabire, Waropen, Yapen, Biak Numfor, Supiori, Mamberamo, Sarmi, and Jayapura, the process of pounding the sago pith to extract starch is a central skill used to sustain life. Producing sago involves the process of extracting starch from the sago pith to produce a flour which can be stored for months to be cooked whenever needed. Sago can be processed into a variety of dishes, but papeda is the most common traditional dish. Papeda is usually served with appetising fresh fish soup or grilled fish, or eaten with protein-rich sago worms.

West Papua is also home to nutrient-rich pokem (foxtail millet). Meanwhile, people who live in the interior must be proficient in hunting skills, which are typically performed by adult men and women in groups, sometimes assisted by several hunting dogs.

Indigenous West Papuans living in the lowlands usually cultivate bananas, pineapples, and various vegetables. The highlanders who live in the fertile Baliem Valley grow tubers such as taro and cassava as staple foods. Supported by knowledge of the climate and sophisticated drainage and irrigation systems established thousands of years ago, they farm very efficiently in large cultivated areas.

A Hubula woman proudly displays a piglet. Pigs have value for social status, as a means of exchange, and for feasts to mark important moments in the passage of life. (8/08/2022). Jurnasyanto Sukarno



Knowledge of traditional medicines is essential in West Papuan communities. This ancient knowledge of useful plants is passed down from generation to generation and is primarily preserved by women. One such medicine species that has become well known outside West Papua is masoi (Cryptocarya massoy).

Coastal West Papuans, especially those living in the north, are masters of astronavigation and are very familiar with the signs of nature. This nautical skill allows them to determine the right time to sail and navigate the surrounding high seas.

The iconic architectural traditions of West Papuan houses reflect the craftsmanship of building houses that not only fulfil their social function but also embody the concept of continuity and identity of each community group. They carefully select certain materials and harmonise everything to create a building that is not only a symbol of civilization but also an embodiment of the cultural values carried through the construction process.

Awyu people carry hunting bows and arrows in their customary forest in Boven Digoel. (23/06/2023). Jurnasyanto Sukarno







A glimpse into the daily life of the Awyu community in Yare village, as they work together to harvest sago palm. (22/06/2023). Jurnasyanto Sukarno





Sago grubs harvested in Yoboi village, Sentani Lake. These palm weevil larvae thrive inside felled sago palm trunks, and are ready for harvest after 2 to 3 months. (27/10/2022).

Jurnasyanto Sukarno



Awyu people with traditional attire, accessories and tools are out harvesting sago palm near Yare village, Boven Digoel. (22/06/2023). Jurnasyanto Sukarno







Bakar Batu

Bakar batu, the method of cooking food on baking hot stones, is a much-loved tradition of Indigenous West Papuans who live in the Baliem Valley and Biak, and it is still cherished and practised today. In the tradition of people in the Baliem Valley, particular smooth, rounded stones called jugum tumbu are carefully chosen. The stones, which have been heated until they are baking hot, are placed in a hole in the ground of a certain depth. On top of the hot stones, layers of meat, vegetables, cassava, yams, and taro are arranged in a way that allows the heat from the stones to spread evenly and thoroughly slow-cook all the fresh ingredients.

Among the Biak People, bakar batu is known as 'barapen.' Implemented in a different fashion from the people of the Baliem Valley, the Biak do not dig a hole but simply lay the foodstuffs to be cooked layer by layer on hot stones covered with leaves, starting with meat on the lowest layer, followed by vegetables and tubers on the topmost layer. Barapen is often followed by the ritual of apen bayeren (walking on smouldering stones and embers) to test one's readiness or worthiness to be a leader.

Bakar batu is carried out communally as an expression of gratitude, celebration, maintaining ties with family and relatives, and even as a medium for peace between community groups. It is also often a way to gather relatives for clearing fields, hunting, and building houses.

Biak Indigenous people prepare baking-hot stones for the Apen Bayaren firewalking ritual. (27/10/2022). Jurnasyanto Sukarno



A Biak woman strides across baking-hot stones during the Apen Bayeren firewalking ritual, testing her worthiness to be a leader. This photo was taken during the 2022 Sentani Lake Festival. (27/10/2022).

Jurnasyanto Sukarno









A group of Hubula people in Wamena get together for a bakar batu, a traditional West Papuan cooking method involving a pit oven with hot stones, usually reserved for special occasions with many participants. (12/08/2022). Jurnasyanto Sukarno



Traditional Houses

West Papua boasts a variety of different house designs, adapted to the local environment. Although different in form and function, almost all of them use natural materials such as wood, sago leaves, rattan, bark, bamboo, and thatch. The end result is a house that appears very natural, artistic, functional, and integrated with its environment. Importantly, these traditional building materials are also safe during earthquakes, which are frequent in tectonically active West Papua.

The traditional houses of mountain dwellers, such as the Hubula people, are generally small, with only one entrance. This design's aim is to keep the home warm at night. The Hubula have separate houses for men and women. A Honai is a house for adult men, while Ebei is a house for women, girls and boys who have not reached adolescence.

The Korowai, who live just south of the mountain range between Merauke and Wamena, build houses with elevated floors that resemble houses on stilts. Supported by solid wooden poles, these 'tree houses', with a height of between three and six metres above the ground, are believed to keep them safe from evil spirits.

People who live on the coast also have their own distinctive traditional houses. The Asmat people have a house called a 'Jew' that is built like a house on stilts. This house is generally a long rectangle with tight walls and built without the use of nails. Apart from being a place for deliberation, this house is also a place for boys to learn various skills and knowledge. The traditional house of the Biak Numfor people (a Rumsram house) and the traditional house of the Tobati-Enggros people (a Kariwari house) also have similar functions. Kariwari are commonly found in coastal areas such as Yotefa Bay and Lake Sentani. The building is tall and sturdy as if ready to block the strong sea breeze, with an octagonal pyramid roof and divided into several floors. Each floor has its own function. Meanwhile, the Rumsram house has a very artistic appearance, with a roof shape resembling an inverted boat.



A Hubula child from Yiwika village, Jayawijaya Regency stands in a traditional house. (10/08/2022). Jurnasyanto Sukarno



The Korowai people of southeastern West Papua are famous for their expertise in tree house construction. (17/10/2017).

Markus Mauthe









A traditional highlands Honai dwelling sits near the controversial new Trans Papua Highway in Wamena, Jayawijaya Regency. UNESCO has urged the closure of a long stretch of the road due to the threats posed by the road cutting through World Heritage-listed Lorentz National Park. (11/08/2022). Jurnasyanto Sukarno



Hubula women stand among Honai traditional houses in Yiwika village, Baliem Valley. (10/08/2022). Jurnasyanto Sukarno

A group of young Hubula gather in front of a traditional Honai house, sharing stories and laughter.

The girls wear sali made from dried plant fibre, and the boys wear koteka made from dried gourd fruit. (10/08/2022).

Jurnasyanto Sukarno

Arts and Celebrations

The artistic traditions of Indigenous West Papuans are heavily influenced by the way they live and interpret life, their relationship with nature and fellow humans as well as the way they honour the spirits of their ancestors expressed through various rituals. For this reason, art for Indigenous West Papuans is not only a visible work but also a part of their identity and an expression of spiritual values.

In the world of fine arts, Sentani, Asmat, Yos Sudarso Bay, Teluk Cendrawasih, and Raja Ampat are some of the areas where beautiful sculptures and wood carvings can be found. Many works from these regions feature Indigenous West Papuan ancestors, ancestral pillars, house pillars, war shields, masks, and objects used in rituals. The people of Yos Sudarso Bay are particularly known for carving boat decorations, house panels, and making bark paintings called khombow or maro.

Art is also a form of offering in many Indigenous West Papuan communal rituals. These include celebrations of births, weddings, deaths, hopes for a better life, and other important events. Wor, for example, is a series of sacred rituals performed by the Biak people that include singing and dancing to invoke protection at every stage of their rites of passage.

On the other hand, Indigenous West Papuans also understand that art is a means of maintaining community and expressing joy. In world-famous events such as the Lake Sentani Festival and the Baliem Valley Cultural Festival, they will perform in their best traditional attire, playing tifa drums to accompany dances distinctive to their own ethnic groups.



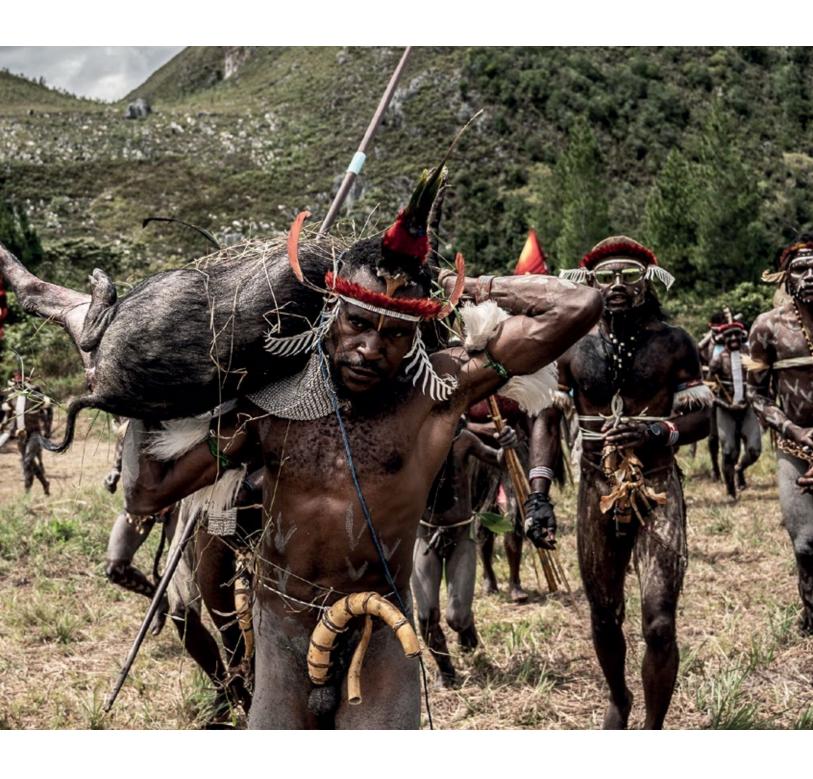
Tree bark painting from Asei Island in Lake Sentani. Similar motifs appear in ancient rock art found elsewhere in West Papua. (29/10/2022). Jurnasyanto Sukarno





Two young women from Biak proudly display traditional body painting at Sentani Lake Festival. (27/10/2022).

Jurnasyanto Sukarno



A festive atmosphere at the Baliem Valley Festival, with a man running while carrying a pig. (8/08/2022). Jurnasyanto Sukarno







Top: The Awyu community work together to carry a massive wooden pole hewn from a rainforest tree to the centre of Yare village, Boven Digoel. (22/06/2023).

Jurnasyanto Sukarno



Top and bottom left: Awyu people gather for a ceremonial declaration of their land rights in Kowo village, Boven Digoel. During the ceremony they staked into the ground a symbol and signboard referencing a landmark constitutional law case that recognised Indigenous rights over forest areas.

(24/06/2023).

Jurnasyanto Sukarno



Four teenagers from Asei Island, Sentani Lake have their faces painted. The Asei people are renowned for their artistic paintings on tree bark. (29/10/2022). Jurnasyanto Sukarno





Bottom left: A Hubula man seen inside a Honai. (8/08/2022).

Jurnasyanto Sukarno

The intricate and beautiful details of these distinctive West Papuan headdresses are a testament to the skill and artistry of their creators. These belong to Awyu men (top pair and bottom right).

(23/06/2023).

Jurnasyanto Sukarno



Awyu people gather for a declaration of land rights ceremony in Kowo village, Boven Digoel. (24/06/2023). Jurnasyanto Sukarno



The Hubula people of the Baliem Valley demonstrate their rich culture through harmonious dances during the Baliem Valley festival. (8/08/2022).

Jurnasyanto Sukarno





A Hubula martial reenactment during the Baliem Valley Festival in Wamena. (8/08/2022). Jurnasyanto Sukarno



The Hubula people of the Baliem Valley demonstrate their rich culture through harmonious dances during the Baliem Valley festival. (8/08/2022).

Jurnasyanto Sukarno



Along with birds-of-paradise, these hourglass shaped Tifa drums are emblematic of West Papua and surrounds. Known by different names across Melanesia, they are all made from wood with an animal skin membrane, often taken from a monitor lizard. Here they are being played at the Sentani Lake Festival. (25/10/2022).

Jurnasyanto Sukarno





Participants in the Sentani Lake Festival are painted before a dance performance. (26/10/2022).

Jurnasyanto Sukarno

A Hubula man in full traditional regalia with a modern touch, seen in Wamena. (8/08/2022). Jurnasyanto Sukarno







West Papuan dancers prepare to perform during the vibrant Baliem Valley Festival in Wamena. (9/08/2022). Jurnasyanto Sukarno



Dancers arrive by boat during the Sentani Lake Festival. (25/10/2022). Jurnasyanto Sukarno



Getting ready to perform a traditional welcome dance during an event in Yare village, Boven Digoel. (21/06/2023).

Jurnasyanto Sukarno



A beam of light illuminates intricate details in a dance group's traditional headpieces as they move to the rhythm of music at the Sentani Lake festival. (26/10/2022).

Jurnasyanto Sukarno

Noken

Carried slung across the chest, or looped around the head like a bandana, the noken is a woven bag that is heavy-duty, flexible, and durable. Noken (from the word inoken/inokenson) is a Biakterm; some other names are eno (Wambon/Mandobo), ese (Asmat), jum (Hubula), and agia (Mee). Made in various sizes, noken are used to carry large and small everyday items, crops, animals, and even babies. Noken are coloured with natural dyes and are made entirely from natural materials such as wood fibre, leaves, orchids and even the fur of animals such as cuscus. The Mee people in Bobomani village, Dogiyai district, for instance, know at least nine species of forest orchids whose fibres can be utilised to make noken. In coastal areas such as Raja Ampat, Sorong, and South Sorong, noken are generally made from pandanus leaves and tend not to be as strong as wood fibre noken. Because of its high cultural value, and to prevent the art of noken weaving from extinction, in 2012 UNESCO designated noken as an Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding.



A Hubula woman wearing a noken and a feathered headpiece (8/08/2022).

Jurnasyanto Sukarno





These two images from around Sentani market in Jayapura district capture the practicality and style of carrying a noken while on the go. Infinitely adaptable noken bags, hand-knotted from plant fibre, can carry everything from babies and bananas to fish and firewood. The noken has been placed on UNESCO's List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding. (1/07/2022).

Jurnasyanto Sukarno

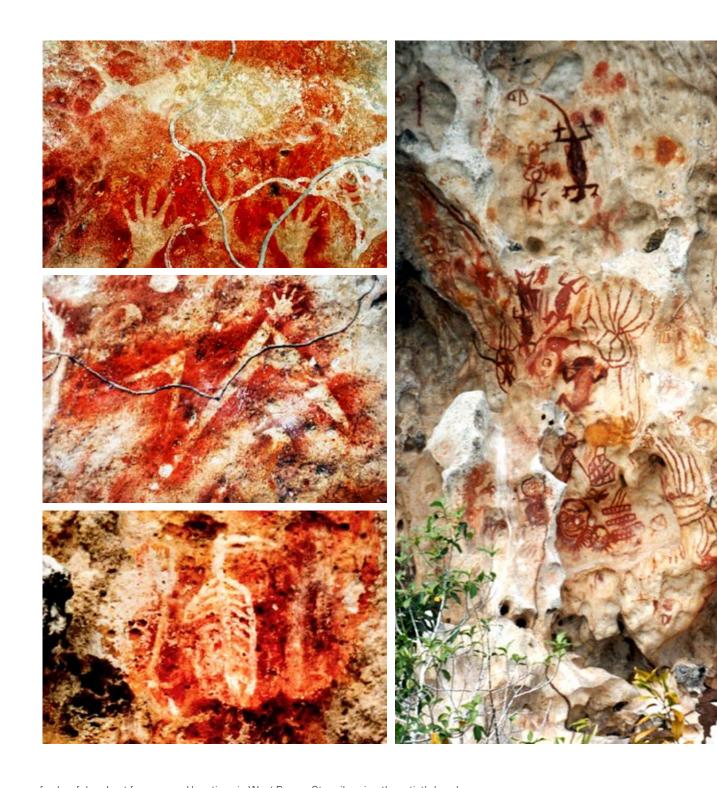
Ancient Rock Art

Sometimes hidden, sometimes found in prominent positions, rock art was painted, stencilled, and chiselled on coastal cliff faces and in rock walls of the interior by Indigenous West Papuans. Most rock art appears to have been made in prehistoric times; however, the tradition is still practised in some places in West Papua and is associated with sacred values. The majority of rock drawings are found in coastal areas, such as Kaimana, Berau Bay, and around Jayapura, including Lake Sentani. The rest are found in the mountains, including the Baliem Valley.

Rock art found in coastal areas is generally painted on the walls of rocks bordering the sea, while the art in the island's interior is typically found in caves or on large rocks. Some rock drawings in coastal areas are located at sites where human bone placement rituals were performed, while in other locations, the rock art is associated with stories of the creation of the universe. Red is the dominant colour used in the art; however, some rock paintings also feature other colours, such as brown, yellow, black, and white.

The painted designs often feature animals such as fish, lizards, turtles, and crocodiles. In addition, geometric shapes are shown along with celestial bodies, especially the sun. Rock art is also found in the form of face paintings, masks, or 'matutuo,' a half-human, half-lizard anthropomorphic figure. Some designs use tattoo motifs, and some Indigenous West Papuans reportedly visited the sites of these rock paintings to replicate the motifs and draw them on their own bodies. Other images found were made with hand stencils or tools such as hair combs and boomerangs.





These pictures are of colourful rock art from several locations in West Papua. Stencils using the artist's hand are common. Some objects more rarely used for stencilling are also seen in the photographs here: feet, fish and lizards, and manufactured items including boomerangs and hair combs. The locations of this mostly coastal art include Afofo and Sora in the Berau Gulf. On this page is also just one image of art from a sacred site called Subulah/Suroba in the Baliem valley, in which a matutuo-like figure is clearly seen. There is also a pattern of rectangles alongside it, which could possibly depict the agricultural plots that have been a feature of life in the valley for many thousands of years.

Courtesy of Karina Arifin and Philippe Delanghe, authors of 'Rock Art in West Papua' (UNESCO, 2004).





ECOLOGICAL REGIONS OF WEST PAPUA

Much of the geography of mainland New Guinea was shaped by a tectonic event—the collision of the India-Australia Plate (Sahul Plate) with the Pacific Plate. The striking variation in Papua's topography creates highly diverse ecosystems. Apart from the evolutionary forces arising from being an island, this is the main reason why Papua has a spectacular diversity of flora and fauna and supports various ecological zones. These ecologically diverse areas are outlined below.



An aerial view of the labyrinth of limestone karst islands that make up the Wayag Island group, in the west of the Raja Ampat archipelago. (27/08/2024). Sumaryanto Bronto

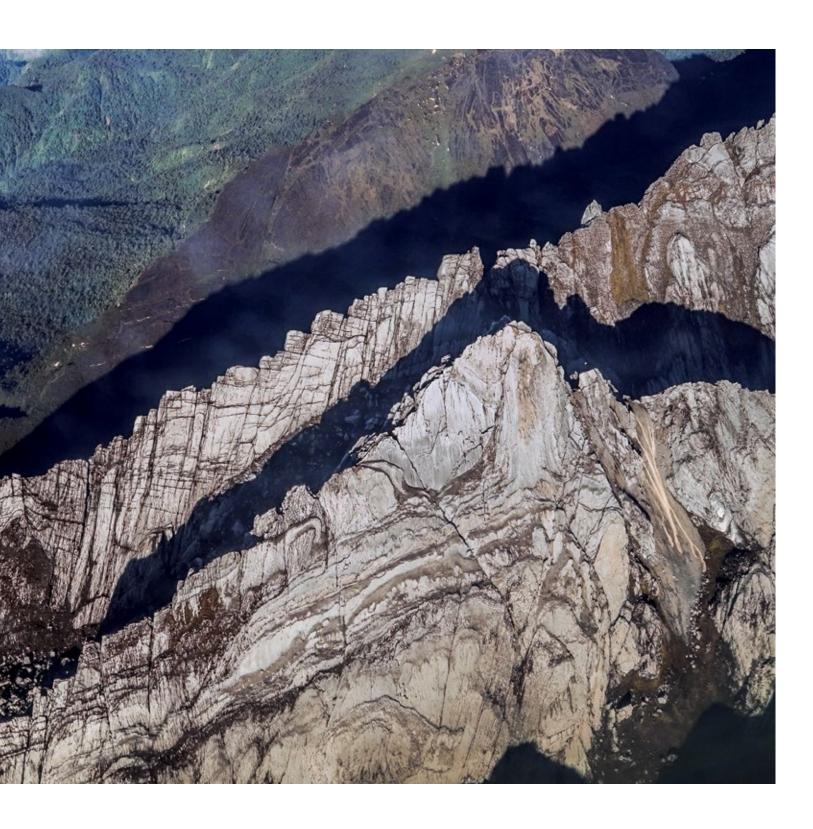


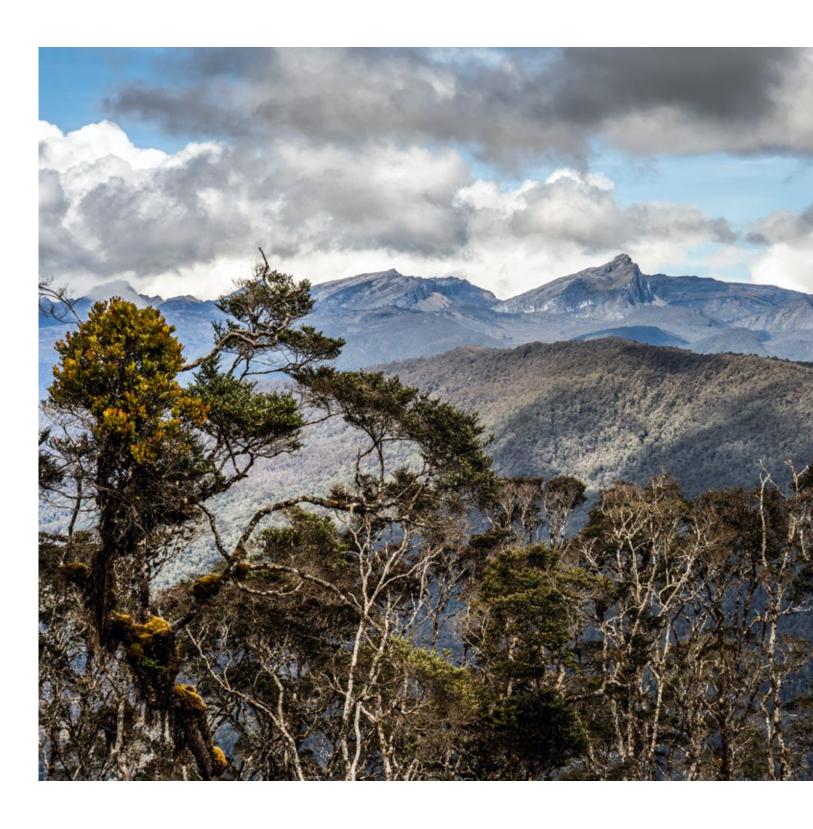
Alpine

This zone encompasses the central highlands of New Guinea that stretch from the east in Papua New Guinea, along the length of the island into West Papua. Its mountain ranges are estimated to be 30-60 million years old. The most stunning part of the Maoke range is arguably the glacier-tipped peak of Nemangkawi Ninggok, meaning 'tip of the white arrow' in the Amungkal language, which rises to 4,884 metres. Unfortunately, due to global warming, West Papua's tropical glaciers are rapidly retreating and are expected to disappear within a few short years.

The sub-alpine variation of the landscape is below the alpine zone. These areas are covered with cold-hardy vegetation such as heath, tree ferns, grasslands and flowering shrubs, as well as a wide variety of endemic birds and animals, including the rare New Guinea singing dog (Canis hallstromi).

Geological upheaval takes centre stage in the rugged terrain of the Maoke Mountains, Mimika Regency. (24/05/2022). Jurnasyanto Sukarno







Montane Rainforest

Montane rainforest is influenced by topography resulting from tectonic forces - precipitous in the south and gentler in the north. The steep slopes, deep valleys, and dramatic ridgelines in turn influence the climate, which is cold due to high altitude, and continuously damp from cloud and rain generated as moist air from the coast is chilled as it is forced up the central mountains. Elevations range from 1,000 to over 4,000 meters, providing diverse microhabitats. The underlying geology includes ancient limestones, volcanic rocks, and metamorphic formations that influence soil composition and vegetation distribution.

This environment supports lush vegetation, including tree ferns, mosses, orchids and epiphytes - able to find sufficient water primarily from the misty mountain air. Unique conifer trees such as Western New Guinea kauri (Agathis labillardieri) and Podocarpus species (such as Podocarpus archboldii) are found in West Papua's montane rainforests. The fauna is equally remarkable, featuring endemic species adapted to the montane ecosystem, such as the iconic dingiso tree kangaroo (Dendrolagus mbaiso) known as bakaga by the Moni people, which is sadly endangered due to stressors including habitat loss and climate change.

A line of Nothofagus trees in the mountains of Lorentz National Park. The species should be protected but is threatened by the Trans Papua highway along its Wamena-Habema-Kenyam section. (11/08/2022). Jurnasyanto Sukarno





Lowland Rainforest

The lowland forest ecosystems of West Papua cover the largest area on the island, and are characterised by incredibly diverse flora and fauna, and a variety of habitats, ranging from tropical rainforests to wetland forests and mangrove swamp forest. Found below 1,000 meters in elevation, these forests are typically humid, with high rainfall throughout much of the year. The vegetation is dense and includes hundreds of different tall trees, ferns, epiphytes, and thousands of plant species. The ecosystem is home to an extraordinary array of wildlife, including many birds of paradise, tree kangaroos, and a myriad of insects, amphibians, and reptiles. These forests also play a crucial role in regulating the climate and water cycle of the island.

Lowland rainforest like this in Merauke is beautiful but fragile. It provides crucial resources for their Indigenous owners, but is under threat from the central government's plans for a food and energy estate.

(19/12/2017).

Jurnasyanto Sukarno

Swamp Forest and Peatland

West Papua has an ecoregion that is rarely found in other parts of the world: vast areas of carbonrich freshwater swamp forests and peatlands. This ecoregion is mainly located around Mamberamo, Timika, Asmat, and Merauke. These flooded peatlands provide a rich habitat for many endemic species of fish and other animals, as well as fertile ground for a variety of plants, including the naturally growing sago palms.



Fragile wetlands alongside the lower reaches of the Digul River in southeastern West Papua. (1/04/2018). *Ulet Ifansasti*







Savannah

In contrast to most of West Papua, which is dominated by closed forests, the southeast, bordering Papua New Guinea, is a drier ecoregion with grasslands and savannahs that resemble those of northern Australia. The region is covered with eucalyptus and cajuput/gelam (Melaleuca cajuputi). The area has several endemic mammal species, including the now endangered native Papuan wallaby (dusky pademelon - Thylogale brunii) and two species of marsupial carnivores: the bronze quoll (Dasyurus oderniza) and the planigale (Planigale novaeguineae). Wasur National Park lies adjacent to this ecoregion.

Sparse trees with an understory of grass: this example of Trans-Fly savannah is inside an industrial plantation concession in Mappi, Southern Papua. (28/03/2018). Ulet Ifansasti

Riverine

Due to high rainfall, West Papua has several immense rivers that originate in the central mountain ranges. Some of these rivers flow south to the Arafura Sea, while others flow north into the Pacific Ocean. These rivers, including the mighty Mamberamo River, are some of the few 'natural' rivers in the world that still flow without fragmentation from dams. Rich in freshwater fish, these ecological areas are also part of Indigenous people's food supply and serve as an important transport route in West Papua.

A man jumps into the crystal-clear water of the Blue River, a popular spot for locals in Nimbokrang, Jayapura regency. (3/07/2022). Jurnasyanto Sukarno







Freshwater Lakes

Spread across several regions, from the lowlands to the mountains, West Papua has many large and small lakes that play important roles in various aspects of Indigenous West Papuans' lives. Some of these lakes are Lake Sentani, the twin lakes Anggi Gigi and Anggi Gida, Rombebai, and Paniai. There are also hundreds of oxbow lakes, small lakes formed by meandering rivers at lower elevations.

West Papua has many endemic freshwater fish, such as the glittering Irian Jaya Rainbowfish (Melanotaenia irianjaya) which is distinguished by its striking patterns. There is also the sleeper goby Oxyeleotris fimbriata, a fish that is well-adapted to the low-oxygen environments found in some lakes and waterways. One of the rarest is the blind cave fish Oxyeleotris colasi known from just one freshwater pool in the Jabuenggara limestone cave system in Lengguru, Kaimana.

Tranquil Lake Yuginopa, sacred to its Indigenous landowners, sits at an elevation of 3,225 metres in the upper reaches of Lorentz National Park. Also known by the colonial name Lake Habema, it spans 225 hectares and is among the highest lakes in the Pacific region. (12/08/2022).

Jurnasyanto Sukarno

Coastal Areas and Mangrove Forest

This ecoregion covers large portions of coastal areas and river estuaries where mangrove trees, sago and nipa palms, and pandanus plants grow in abundance. Mangrove forests, which at their most oceanward extreme often coexist with seagrass beds and clusters of coral reefs, protect the coast from erosion and are a safe haven for the early stages of marine life. Mangrove forests also store more carbon per hectare than many terrestrial tropical forests. Interestingly, New Guinea has the highest diversity of mangrove species in the world, with 30 species recorded in Bintuni Bay alone. It is important to maintain the integrity of the mangrove forests in West Papua as a store of biodiversity and carbon; hence, they must be prevented from being converted into shrimp ponds, as has happened to many mangrove forests in the archipelago.

Researchers from University of Papua and Greenpeace Indonesia collect soil samples in the mangrove forest conservation area of Bintuni Bay. (06/09/2024).

Jurnasyanto Sukarno









Marine and Archipelagic

The island of New Guinea is surrounded by oceans and small islands, with numerous bays and peninsulas, all of which make the surrounding waters extraordinarily rich in marine life. The western part, known as the Bird's Head, has a cluster of small-to-medium islands, including the Raja Ampat archipelago. The world recognises Raja Ampat as a group of islands renowned for its natural beauty, with karst mountains surrounded by clear blue seas, as well as the unrivalled beauty and richness of its biota. The Raja Ampat Marine Protected Area is proposed as a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve. As part of the world's Coral Triangle, Raja Ampat's waters contain some of the richest marine biodiversity in the world. Astoundingly, Raja Ampat is home to 70% of the world's coral reef species and more than a thousand species of coral reef fish.

Another cluster of islands is the Biak Islands and the Yapen Islands. These two groups fall within the Cenderawasih Bay region, which is the largest marine park in Indonesia. The bay is home to whale sharks, and like Raja Ampat, it has vast coral reefs supported by mangrove swamps.

A diver explores the vivid underwater world of Batu Rufus, Raja Ampat, where diverse marine species find their own niches at varying depths. (29/08/2024). Alif R Nouddy Korua





A stunning sunset at the Wayag Island group, Raja Ampat. (27/08/2024). Sumaryanto Bronto



Rain falls gently over Bintuni Bay, where the islands offshore of Kokas in Fakfak regency are silhouetted against the warm glow of sunset. (07/09/2024).

Jurnasyanto Sukarno

Flora and Fauna

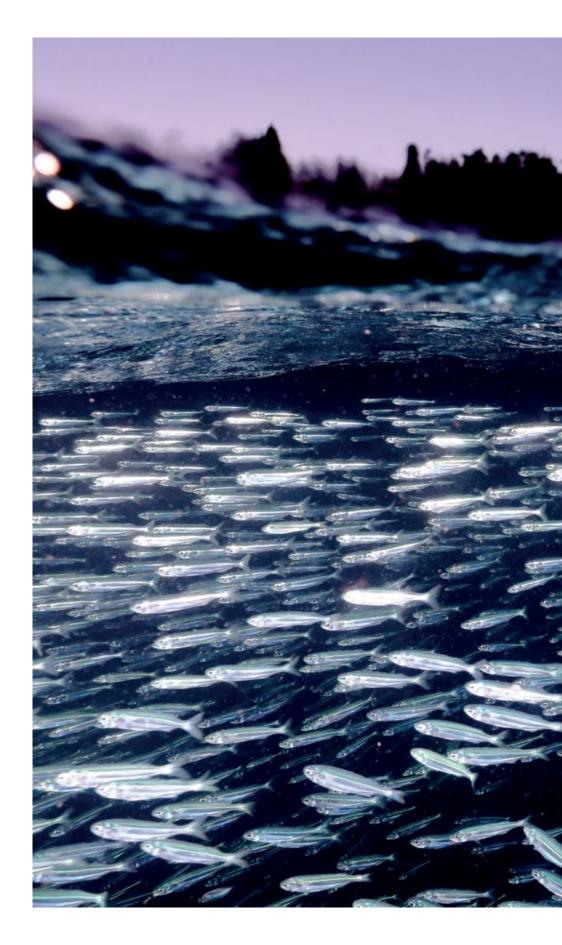
Nothing matches New Guinea's plant diversity: in 2020, a hundred botanists working jointly announced their finding that the island was home to more than 13,000 plant species. This astonishing estimate may increase in the future, as there are still vast areas yet to be studied, particularly in West Papua. This discovery easily surpasses Madagascar's megadiversity, which was previously ranked the highest in the world. What is equally amazing is that two out of three plant species on the island of New Guinea are endemic, meaning they can be found nowhere else.

West Papua is home to a variety of distinctive animals, some of which include the endangered and shy blue-eyed spotted cuscus, several tree kangaroos, and the pigsnouted tortoise. West Papua also has four species of echidnas, one of which is named after David Attenborough, in honour of the British broadcaster and natural historian. There are also crocodiles, giant 2.5-metre monitor lizards that rival the famous Komodo dragon in length, snakes, endless insect species including the world's largest butterfly, and many species of bats.

The island of New Guinea is home to around 700 species of birds, over half of which are endemic. West Papua is synonymous with birds-of-paradise, considered by many to be the most beautiful birds in the world, but also so timid that only a few have ever seen one in person. It is also home to bowerbirds, which scour their surroundings for colourful objects to create an exquisite display to attract potential mates. As if to contrast all this beauty, West Papua is also home to Pitohui birds, which carry one of the most poisonous substances in the wild — the same substance found in poisonous dart frogs in South America.



A green sea turtle (Chelonia mydas) swims through the clear waters of Raja Ampat. (13/01/2020). Paul Hilton



The Raja Ampat archipelago is an internationally renowned marine biodiversity hotspot. (14/01/2020). Paul Hilton





The waters of Raja Ampat support a diverse range of marine species. (16/01/2020). Paul Hilton



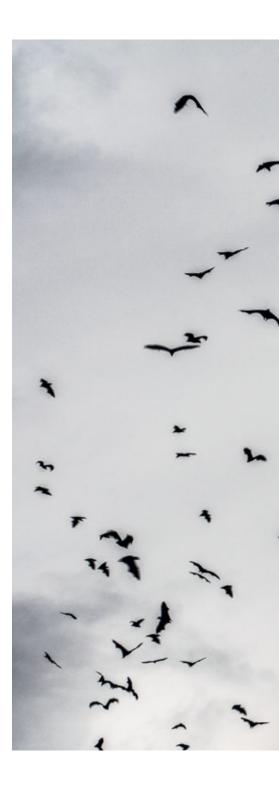


The Golden-mantled tree-kangaroo (Dendrolagus pulcherrimus) is found in the Foja mountains just north of the Mamberamo river. It is listed by the IUCN as critically endangered. (1/12/2005). Steven Richards

Greater tube-nosed bat (Nyctimene aello) in Nimbokrang swamp forest. (20/07/2011). Bernard Van Elegem







A dragonfly rests on a twig in the forest of Berab, Nimbokrang. (4/07/2022). Jurnasyanto Sukarno



Every evening thousands of bats leave their roosts on Um Island to search for food until dawn. (14/08/2022).

Jurnasyanto Sukarno



A whale shark (Rhincodon typus) in Cenderawasih Bay National Park, the largest marine park in Indonesia. (15/05/2013). Paul Hilton





Blacktip reef sharks in the shallow waters of Raja Ampat, where the type specimen for the species (Carcharhinus melanopterus) was caught and described two centuries ago. (16/08/2022). Jurnasyanto Sukarno





A blacktip reef shark (Carcharhinus melanopterus) swims amongst schools of fish in Raja Ampat. (16/01/2020). Paul Hilton



The uniquely constructed epiphyte Myrmecodia pendans, a plant that has evolved to grow a system of tunnels and caverns suitable to host a colony of ants. It does not root in the ground but instead collects nutrients from organic matter the ants bring inside with them, and benefits from their protection. (11/08/2022). Jurnasyanto Sukarno

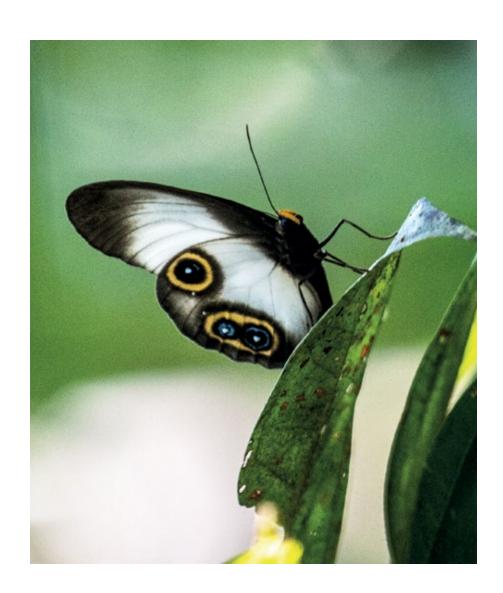
These colourful polypore fungi are seen in forest belonging to the Awyu people in Boven Digoel. Fungi play a crucial role in the decomposition process, returning nutrients to the soil, enabling new life.

(23/06/2023).

Jurnasyanto Sukarno







A butterfly rests (right) and a spiny orb-weaver hangs from its web in the forest of Rhepang Muaif, Nimbokrang (left). (4/07/2022). Jurnasyanto Sukarno

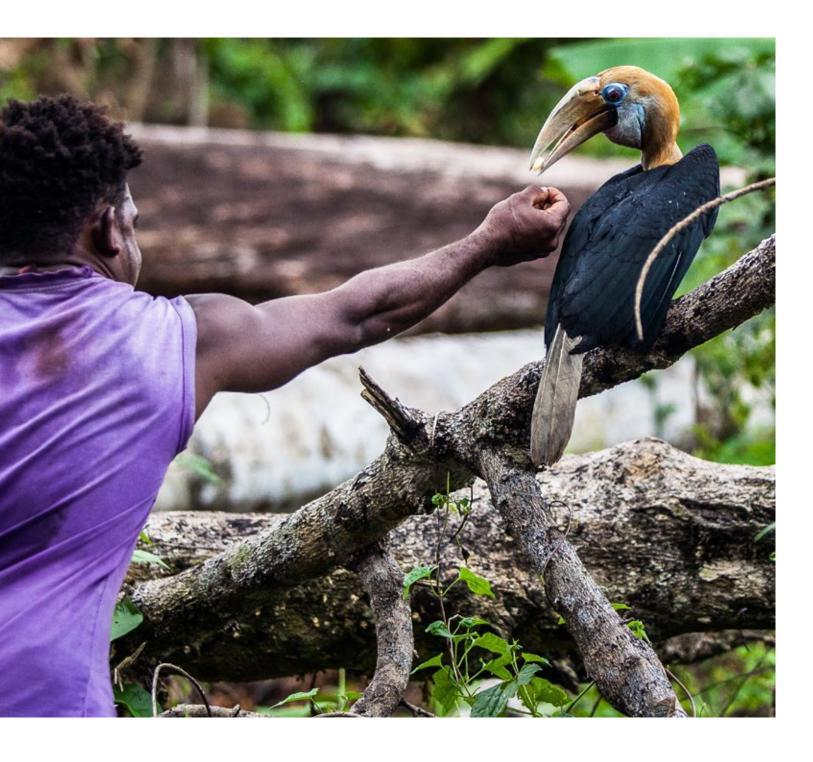






A juvenile (top) and an adult (below) Northern cassowary (Casuarius unappendiculatus) in the forest at Malagufuk village, Sorong. (6/06/2017).

Jurnasyanto Sukarno



Moi man Julianus of Malagufuk village feeds a Papuan hornbill (Rhyticeros plicatus) in the Klasou Valley rainforest, Sorong. (6/06/2017). Jurnasyanto Sukarno





A close-up view of a red bird-of-paradise (Paradisaea rubra) in mid-air, capturing the intricate details of its feathers and the intensity of its dance. A species found only in West Papua's Raja Ampat archipelago, this individual was photographed at Saporkren village, South Waigeo. (17/08/2022).

Jurnasyanto Sukarno



A male lesser bird-of-paradise (Paradisaea minor) sings from a tree, calling to its mate in the forest of Rhepang Muaif, Nimbokrang, Jayapura Regency. Birdwatchers can hope to spot at least three dozen species in the area, many of them endemic to the island of New Guinea. (4/07/2022).

Jurnasyanto Sukarno



Wilson's bird-of-paradise (Diphyllodes respublica) is restricted to just two islands, Waigeo and Batanta, both in Raja Ampat (30/05/2011).

Bernard Van Elegem









A black-capped lory (Lorius lory) near Manokwari. (16/05/2013). Paul Hilton

Sulphur-crested cockatoo, triton subspecies (Cacatua galerita triton) in Rhepang Muaif, Nimbokrang, Jayapura Regency. (4/07/2022). Jurnasyanto Sukarno





A bird-of-paradise in flight through the forest of Malagufuk village, Kalasou valley, Sorong. (7/06/2017).

Jurnasyanto Sukarno

A vogelkop bowerbird (Amblyornis inornata) in the Arfak Mountains, Bird's Head Peninsula. This remarkable species is known for its intelligence, creativity, and complex courtship ritual. Males weave a large, delicate display bower and curate their own choice of colourful objects to woo females. In this case: glossy black seeds, red fungi and yellow and blue fruit. (12/06/2011).

Bernard Van Elegem



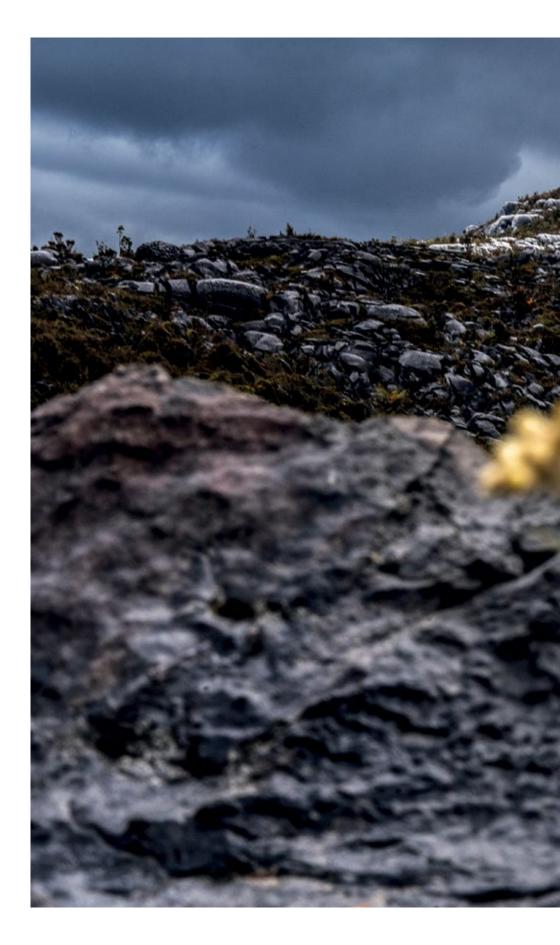
A Papuan harrier (Circus spilothorax) in flight above Lake Yuginopa. This bird, endemic to New Guinea, prefers to hunt in grasslands and swamplands. Because Papuan harriers nest at ground level in tall reeds and grasses, the species is at risk from habitat clearance for plantations and anthropogenically driven fires. (12/08/2022).

Jurnasyanto Sukarno

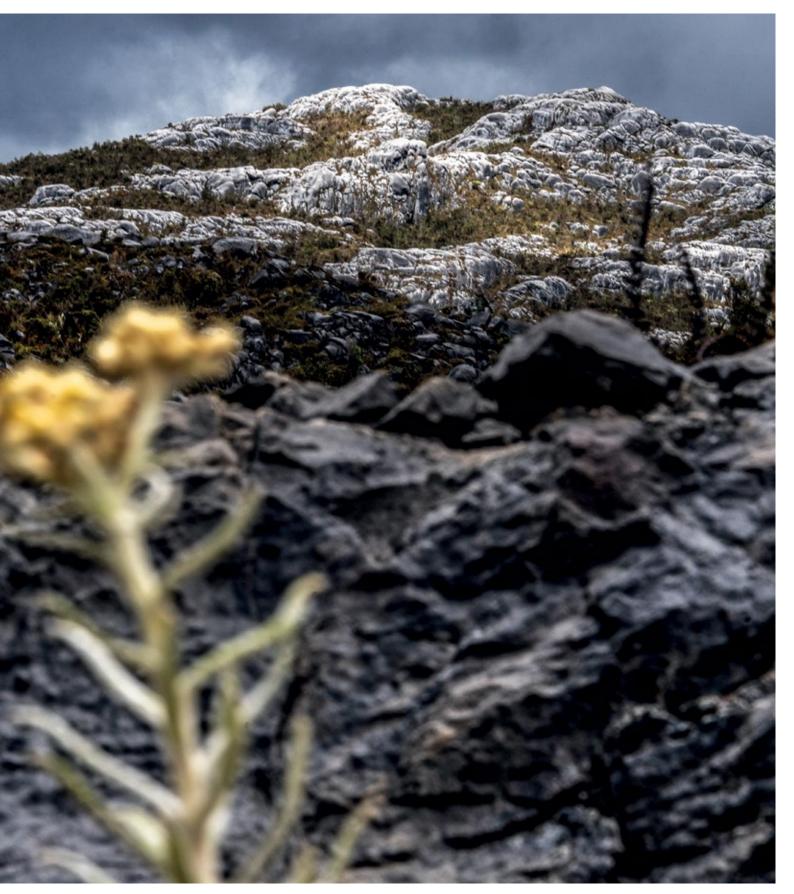


A Papuan hornbill (Rhyticeros plicatus) searches for food around the mangrove forest that lines the Digul River. (21/09/2024).

Jurnasyanto Sukarno



A delicate mountain flower blooms amidst the rugged peaks of West Papua's central mountain range. This iconic plant, known in Indonesia as edelweiss, is a reminder of the fragile beauty of nature. (12/08/2022). Jurnasyanto Sukarno





Cyathea tree fern savanna, an eerie landscape emblematic of West Papua's highlands. Here the ancient genus of fern is thriving in the Yuginopa Lake area, nestled in the Maoke Mountain Range. (12/08/2022).

Jurnasyanto Sukarno







West Papuan Perspectives on Land and Nature

Indigenous West Papuans have a strong attachment to nature and land. Such is the importance of this attachment that it forms the foundation of their traditions and the way they manage their ancestral territories. Though practices vary across language groups, and are shaped by unique ecological landscapes, one truth remains universal, as West Papuans say: 'Papua Bukan Tanah Kosong' ('Papua is not an empty land'). In fact, every inch of land in Papua has an owner and is culturally connected to the surrounding Indigenous population

The Amungme people, for example, have a saying: 'Te aro naweak lake,' which in Amungkal means "nature is me". They perceive the landscape as embodying a mother who raised them, her head in the mountains, her breasts and womb in the valleys, and her legs stretched out toward the Arafura coast. Similarly, the Tehit-Knasaimos people of South Sorong believe that the land and forest are like the womb of a mother who lovingly nurtures the baby she carries.

The Kwerba people in Mamberamo associate the land with culture and livelihoods. Therefore, apart from being a source of food, the forest is also regarded as a sacred place. To protect the forest from irresponsible people who may harm it, the Kwerba people maintain restrictions on who may access it. A similar approach is shared by the Awyu people in Boven Digoel, who emphasise sustainability in their forest management.

In terms of land ownership and management, most West Papuan Indigenous communities adhere to a communal land ownership system. Under this system, each person has the right to use the land (e.g., clearing for food gardens, and collecting forest products). Arrangements are decided by the clan head or by the clan head together with other members. In the case of land rights management, decisions are made jointly. This system is adopted by small, clan-based Indigenous peoples such as Ayamaru, Awyu, Marind-Anim, Biak, and Waropen. In village-based Indigenous peoples such as the Sentani and Genyem communities in Jayapura, land management decisions are made jointly between the clan head and the village head. Only a few West Papuan Indigenous groups adhere to the principle of individual land ownership. This system is adopted by the Muyu people (northeast of Merauke) and the Mee people (central highlands).





A well-equipped group of Awyu women embark to hunt and gather food in Boven Digoel, showing the central role they play in their communities and their deep bond with their customary forest. (23/06/2023). Jurnasyanto Sukarno







An Awyu man roasts a wild pig he caught in his customary forest (23/06/2023). Jurnasyanto Sukarno



In this photograph, a group of Awyu people happily prepare a meal together. Cooking is often a communal activity where stories are exchanged and laughter is shared. (22/06/2023).

Jurnasyanto Sukarno



This jetty in Saporkren village, Raja Ampat, is a favourite fishing spot for local children. (17/08/2022). Jurnasyanto Sukarno







Children playing 'on top of the world' above Wamena. (11/08/2022). Jurnasyanto Sukarno



The Wambon people of Aiwat village, Boven Digoel prepare traditional dishes including sago, bananas and fish. (23/09/2024).

Jurnasyanto Sukarno



In Aiwat village, Boven Digoel, residents invite Greenpeace Indonesia activists to join in opening up a bamboo steamer, used to cook a feast of local delicacies. (23/09/2024). Jurnasyanto Sukarno





Indigenous West Papuans have long faced the challenges of daily life in an often difficult environment, but now face unprecedented threats not only to themselves but to their land. Furthermore, these new pressures carry implications that ripple far beyond their forested island home, affecting the entire planet. The major threats come primarily from sweeping transformation of land use - conversion of forests into mining operations, infrastructure development and commercial plantations on a vast scale. Industrial land use permits (known as 'concessions') are not only being issued over land in the lowlands, but are also spreading to higher landscapes. Nearly one million hectares of West Papua's forests have been cleared in the last two decades, for mining, oil palm and pulpwood plantations, logging, and road development. A push to develop biofuel and a 'food estate' of rice, sugarcane, corn and other crops is a new threat. Concessions granted for the sole benefit of companies controlled by a handful of oligarchs are deeply unfair to Indigenous West Papuans. This marginalises them from collective ownership and management of their land.

Extensive areas of peatland and wetlands in south-eastern West Papua, including this landscape in Mappi, have been granted to private plantation companies without regard to preexisting Indigenous land rights and environmental regulations. (29/03/2018). Ulet Ifansasti





Mining

Mining is a threat to the ecology and communities of West Papua. The most obvious, long-standing example is Freeport Indonesia's gold and copper mining in Mimika regency. The Grasberg mine located in the Maoke mountain range has radically altered the landscape and destroyed river ecosystems due to over a billion tons of mine waste ('tailings') flowing from the highlands of Tembagapura to the lowlands of Timika. The Amungme people, for whom the glacier-capped Nemangkawi mountain is sacred, have been displaced from their ancestral home settlements. The Kamoro people, who live in southern Mimika, have lost their natural food sources because the rivers and estuaries where they fish have been polluted by mining waste.

Mining also exposes Indigenous West Papuans to major and sudden social changes. In addition to ecological impacts, there are also changes to the economic system, and the situation becomes more complicated when an influx of migrants from outside West Papua results from mining activities. With economic disparities and cultural clashes becoming all but inevitable, the position of Indigenous landowners is becoming increasingly marginalised. Many feel that the compensation benefits they receive from the theft of ancestral land and the wealth it contains are not worth the pain they have experienced.

A similar threat will also arise if the gold mining plan for the Wabu Block in Intan Jaya Regency is realised. Gag Island, Kawe Island and several other islands in Raja Ampat have also not been spared from the environmental risk and damage arising from nickel mining.

The Dutch called it Carstensz Pyramid, in Indonesian it is known as Puncak Jaya, but to the Amungme people for whom it is sacred, this glacier-capped mountain has always been Nemangkawi. The Amungme people have long demanded the restoration of Amungkal names for the mountain landscape and their lands forcefully taken over from 1967 to establish the massive Freeport Indonesia mining operation. (24/05/2022). Jurnasyanto Sukarno







Varying geological processes shaped the island clusters that make up the Raja Ampat archipelago, and as a result there is a wide variation in topography and soil type. Unsurprisingly then, the islands are home to a host of endemic plant and animal species found nowhere else on earth. Together with the megadiverse marine environment, the archipelago is truly World Heritage material. Nickel strip mining as seen here on Kawe Island poses a serious environmental threat to this. (27/08/2024). Sumaryanto Bronto



Greenpeace activists draw attention to the damage being done by nickel mining in West Papua's Raja Ampat islands. The archipelago has world-beating marine biodiversity, but sediment flowing from mined areas into the sea is smothering the fragile coral reefs that fringe these islands. (28/08/2024).

Sumaryanto Bronto



Looking southwards to the Arafura Sea during sunset at the port that services the town of Timika. This is the Indigenous lands of the Kamoro people, whose traditional food sources include the fish and molluscs that thrive in the mangrove ecosystems here. Unfortunately, the mighty Ajkwa river just to the east has been smothered in over one billion tons of mine waste dumped into the river by Freeport Indonesia, a portion of which ends up in the Arafura Sea. (15/09/2024).

Jurnasyanto Sukarno





An aerial view of the total devastation wrought to over 20,000 hectares of rainforest by the dumping of over a billion tons of tailings from Freeport Indonesia's gold and copper mine. A scar so huge that it is visible with the naked eye from space, Freeport Indonesia's riverine tailings (mine waste) disposal has destroyed the Aghawagon dan Ajkwa rivers and impacted dozens of villages of the Amungme and Kamoro people. (14/09/2024).

Jurnasyanto Sukarno





Freeport Indonesia's Grasberg mine was built to extract what was then the world's largest copper and gold deposit, via blasting at this now-abandoned 2.4km wide open pit, followed by ongoing underground mining. Perched on the glacier-capped Nemangkawi mountain, the mine stacks waste rock around the site while grey cement-like mine tailings are dumped directly into the river system. Most of this waste floods out over the lowland rainforest, while a portion of the finer particles flows on into the Arafura Sea. The company estimates that by 2041 it will have dumped 1.7 billion tons of tailings into the system of rivers, wetlands and mangrove estuaries that runs through Amungme and Kamoro lands and alongside the Lorentz national park. (27/03/2013). Ardiles Rante

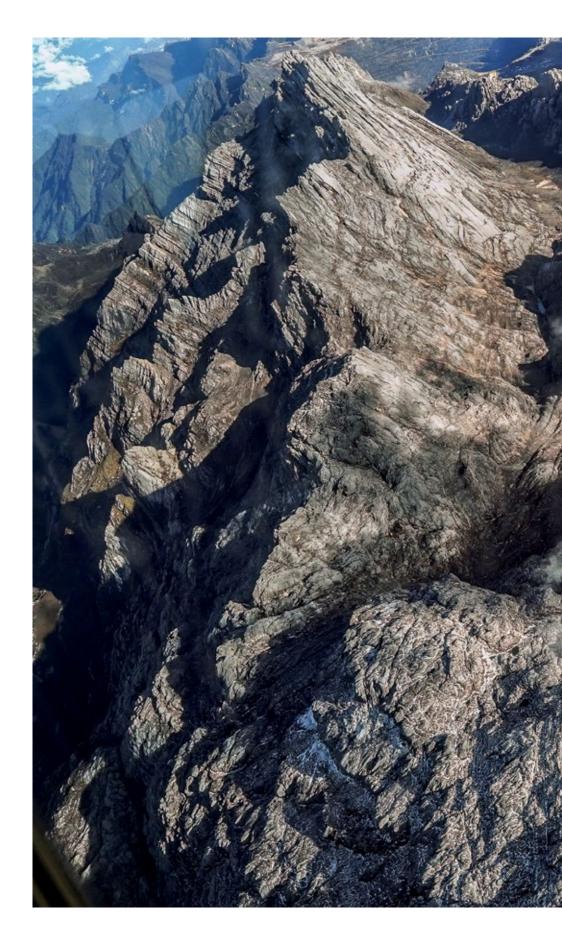


The inevitable result of Freeport Indonesia hollowing out Nemangkawi mountain through open pit and underground mining is a massive amount of waste rock that needs to be placed somewhere. Here it has been trucked into a ziggurat of mine waste just a few kilometers from a glacier, creating a serious risk of acid mine drainage from oxidation of sulfide minerals, a problem that can mobilise toxic heavy metals and that could persist for many decades after the gold has run out. (27/03/2013).

Ardiles Rante







The tropical glaciers that capped a number of peaks in the Maoke Mountains of West Papua have been in retreat since the end of the last ice age, but with humaninduced global warming the pace is rapidly accelerating. They lost about half their extent between 1972 and 2000, and are expected to disappear entirely within a few years. (24/05/2022). Jurnasyanto Sukarno





Logging

In the interior of West Papua, it seems the saw blade never dulls. The sound of machines felling merbau trees is a roar, breaking the silence of the forest. West Papua is the main supplier of Indonesia's merbau exports. As a result, Indonesia's merbau is now listed as near-threatened on the IUCN 'Red List'. Merbau exporting companies steal or buy timber from Indigenous forest communities at very low prices, but sell it at prices many times higher. The few benefits that Indigenous forest owners receive are not worth the damage that they are left with.

The aftermath of deforestation: rainforest trees newly felled by a palm oil company in Muting district, Merauke. Some of the world's leading household brands have sourced palm oil from the owners of this plantation.(26/04/2013).

Ardiles Rante





Swamp forest cleared for an oil palm plantation in Merauke. (1/04/2018). Ulet Ifansasti One corner of a palm oil plantation under construction on Indigenous lands in Merauke. Tens of thousands of hectares of forest are cleared for most such plantations, followed in this case by stacking and deliberate burning of cleared vegetation.

(26/03/2013).

Ardiles Rante





Now you see it.... now you don't. Rainforest in Merauke, seen in its intact form (left) and in the process of being cleared for a palm oil plantation (right). (1/04/2018). *Ulet Ifansasti*



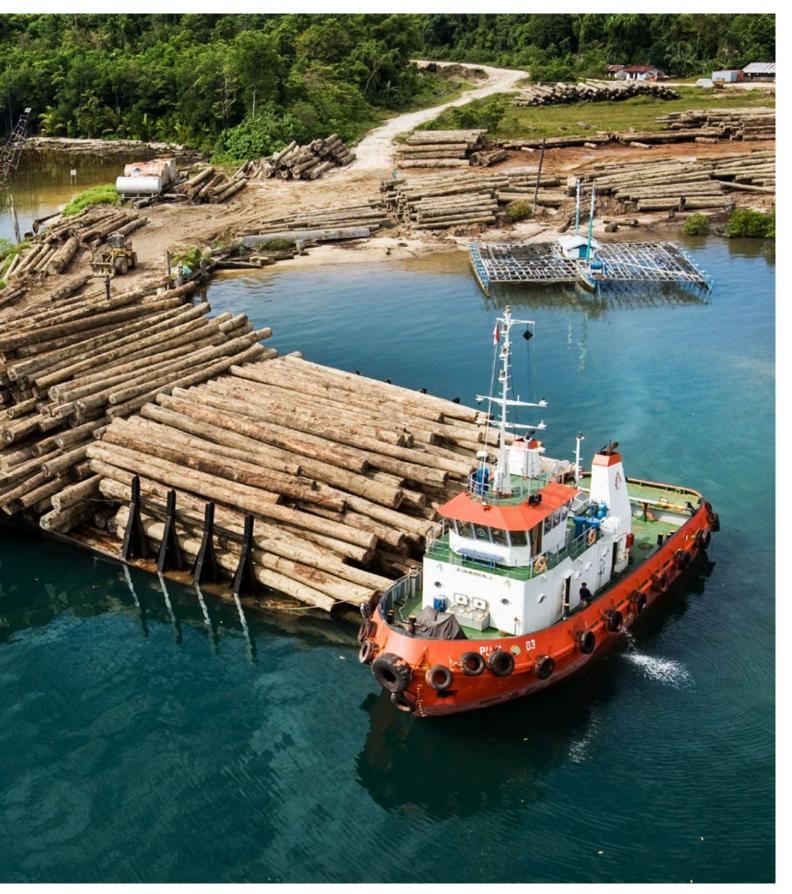




A logging concession in Merauke. (1/04/2018). *Ulet Ifansasti*



A ship groans under the weight of valuable logs being loaded at Nabire in Cenderawasih Bay. Exporting companies reap immense profits from highly sought-after Merbau timber, snatched from Indigenous forest lands. For communities, any financial benefit is scant and fleeting - overshadowed by irreparable damage to ancient ecosystems. The cost is measured not just in trees felled but in the diminished productivity of a landscape that sustains both nature and culture. (13/10/2008). Ardiles Rante



The Plantation Industry

The biggest threat to Papua's forests comes from forest clearance for industrial plantations: oil palm, sugar cane, and acacia for the pulp and paper industry or biomass energy. Companies are granted large-scale plantation concessions over forests and land owned by Indigenous peoples. While not all of the forests in these concessions have been cleared, Greenpeace Indonesia considers this to be planned deforestation. Papua's forests provide a wealth of ecological services, from food, medicine, and building materials to clean water, maintaining habitats for biodiversity, and storing vast amounts of carbon. Allowing this planned deforestation to go ahead would mean making a major contribution to climate-wrecking carbon emissions.



A diverse primary forest canopy in West Papua's Mappi district. Pictured is part of 38,000 hectares of Indigenous peoples' forest handed to a plantation company through a government decision made in far-away Jakarta. (28/03/2018). *Ulet Ifansasti*







Indigenous forestlands being cleared by a multinational company for palm oil production in Boven Digoel. (1/04/2018).

Ulet Ifansasti





A meandering loop of river flows through primary forest in Kumbis, Merauke. (19/12/2017). Jurnasyanto Sukarno



Terraces carved into a hillside, freshly cleared for a palm oil plantation, mimic the gentle curves of a meandering river. Yet unlike the river that nurtures nature and supports Indigenous communities, this scar cut into Merauke's rainforest heralds destruction and loss. (1/04/2018).

Ulet Ifansasti

Infrastructure Development

Some central government policies on infrastructure development also show a disregard for the interests of Papua's Indigenous Peoples and environmental sustainability. One is the 2022 decision taken in Jakarta to divide West Papua into 6 provinces and 40 regencies. This policy, opposed by many West Papuans, will be followed by a heavy influx of migrants from outside West Papua and infrastructure development for the new local governments and incoming investors.

The construction of the Trans Papua Highway is another such example. This road will stretch 3,887 kilometres from Sorong in the west, cutting through Lorentz National Park in central Papua, then on to Jayapura, and down south to Merauke. The construction of this road will accelerate the pace of extractive industry expansion and make it easier for investors to extract West Papua's natural resources, even in remote forests. Experts estimate that 4.5 million hectares of forest could be lost by 2036 as a result of the road network. Another concerning development is the idea of damming the Mamberamo River, which would bring extensive environmental impacts.

The loss of forest resources in the name of economic development threatens not only the livelihoods, but also the future of Indigenous peoples. Their abiding knowledge systems and nature-based economies are at risk of replacement with capitalist development practices that only serve to siphon out wealth for fly-in fly-out investors.



The Trans Papua Highway runs through the Maoke Mountains close to Mount Ettiakup (also known as Trikora Peak). (12/08/2022).

Jurnasyanto Sukarno



Merauke Food Estate Project

The central government's plan to allocate millions of hectares in West Papua for a 'food estate' and for biofuel production involves a rapid industrial agriculture expansion into Indigenous peoples' land. Alongside accelerating land grabbing in the 3.2 million hectare target area in and around Merauke, the plan also promises to turbocharge biodiversity losses and greenhouse gas emissions.

Indigenous West Papuans hold a deep cultural connection to their traditional foods—sago, diverse vegetables, fruits, tubers, fresh fish, and meats—sustained by their gardening, gathering and hunting skills. However, the central government's replacement of these food landscapes with commercially profitable crops like corn and rice will devalue both their traditional foods and cultural heritage, a phenomenon known as 'gastro-colonialism.'

Deep local knowledge of native plant food species enhances food security, nutrition and dietary diversity. The centrally-prescribed food estate approach replaces forests and complex food landscapes with monoculture crops, reducing opportunities for the continuation of the natural food systems of Indigenous peoples and autonomous local production of varied produce by small-scale farming communities. This, along with the government's emphasis on starchy monocrop commodities, will undoubtedly worsen rather than improve households' secure access to a healthy, diverse diet.

Given that the UN has identified climate change as a driver of global food insecurity, then ironically, far from improving nutrition in Indonesia, the massive carbon emissions from clearing for the food estate program in West Papua risks worsening national food security. The one-million-hectare peatland project in Central Kalimantan, which drained and destroyed hundreds of thousands of hectares of peat forest and failed to produce increased food supply, is an example of the folly of similar grandiose projects in the past.



Indigenous West Papuan activists from Merauke protest the government's plan for a Strategic National Project Biofuel and Food Estate, in front of the Defense Ministry in Jakarta. Protestors hold signs saying "Food Estate For Whom?", "West Papua Belongs to Papuan People Not The State", and "Papua is Not an Empty Land - Don't be Greedy". (16/10/2024).

(16/10/2024). Afriadi Hikmal

Freshly cleared forest in Jagebob, South Papua province. The area is slated for sugarcane plantations as part of the central government's "National Strategic Project" to produce food and biofuel in southern Papua. (5/10/2024).

Pusaka Bentala Rakyat 2024





Biodiversity Loss

Widespread planned deforestation comes at a high price: the loss of biodiversity and the opportunity to slow the pace of climate change. Climate change in turn brings inevitable knock-on effects that threaten the natural world: intensifying cycles of drought and floods, a loss of ecological niches for West Papua's specialised endemic species.

For Indigenous West Papuans, this amounts to a bleak future: instability of livelihoods and the loss of extraordinary biodiversity. One study estimates that climate change will impact at least 720 species commonly used by Indigenous West Papuans for food, medicine, building materials, and cultural ceremonies.

However unfairly, we are leaving Indigenous peoples to face this alone. The rich and unique biodiversity of West Papua will become nothing more than a fairy tale if the next generation cannot experience it. Are we able to recognise that we bear responsibility for these policies, and are we willing to help avert this toxic future?



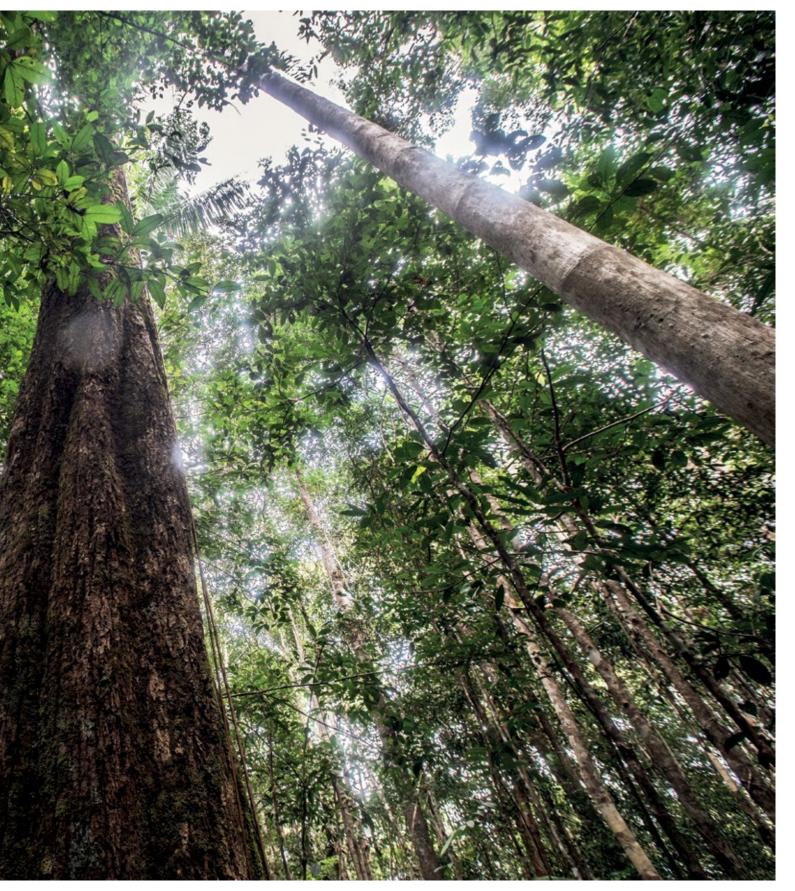
An Awyu man indicates polypore 'bracket' fungi while gathering food in his customary forest in Boven Digoel. (23/06/2023).

Jurnasyanto Sukarno





A panoramic view of dense forest on traditional lands belonging to the Awyu people in Boven Digoel. (23/06/2023). Jurnasyanto Sukarno







A red flower at Yuginopa Lake in Lorentz National Park, in the mountains of Jayawijaya Regency. (12/08/2022). Jurnasyanto Sukarno





A forest giant reaches for the sky in Nimbokrang, Jayapura Regency. This forest is also home to at least four species of birds-of-paradise, along with other endemic West Papuan birds. (4/07/2022). *Jurnasyanto Sukarno*

Coiled fern fronds growing at Yuginopa (Habema) Lake, in the alpine section of Lorentz National Park. (12/08/2022). Jurnasyanto Sukarno



HAND IN HAND TO PROTECT WEST PAPUA

Forests and oceans in West Papua are increasingly besieged by various extractive activities and deforestation. Indigenous peoples of West Papua are raising their voices to reclaim their rights and recognition of customary lands that have been taken away through logging, oil palm concessions, and mining. For more than a decade, Greenpeace Indonesia has been working with Indigenous peoples and policy makers to achieve solutions to environmental problems in West Papua.

At the same time, Greenpeace has visually documented the biodiversity of West Papua, the threats Indigenous people face due to the loss of their forests and customary lands, and their persistence in voicing their rights. Here is some of the important work that communities in West Papua are doing together with Greenpeace Indonesia.

A Hubula child stands in the gateway framing Yiwika village in the Baliem Valley. (10/08/2022).

Jurnasyanto Sukarno



Recognition of Land Rights for Indigenous Peoples

The Tehit-Knasaimos people's battle for the recognition of their customary land rights began in 2007. They rejected attempts by outsiders to carry out logging and establish palm oil plantations, and instead, together with Bentara Papua and Greenpeace Indonesia, the Tehit-Knasaimos conducted participatory mapping of their customary land and strengthened customary institutions so they could lobby the government to be legally allowed to protect their own lands.

As the first step in reclaiming their land rights and saving their forests from the threat of palm oil developers, in 2012 the communities in Manggroholo and Sira villages proposed village forest management for a partially mapped area of 3,545 hectares. Their battle was not in vain, as they eventually received the rights to village forest management from the governor of the province of West Papua at the end of 2016.

This was only the beginning however, and after further long years of advocacy, in 2023, the South Sorong District Government issued a regulation on the recognition, protection, and respect of Indigenous peoples. This victory allowed the Tehit-Knasaimos Indigenous Peoples to apply for recognition of their customary territories. Finally, in June 2024, the Regent of South Sorong issued a decree on 'Recognition, Protection, and Respect for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Customary Territory of the Tehit-Knasaimos People'. This indicates that the 97,441 hectares of territory belonging to the Tehit-Knasaimos Indigenous People was recognised by the government.

Success stories such as this are unfortunately rare, however. For the Awyu people living at the other end of West Papua in Yare, Boven Digoel District, the only option left to peacefully defend their customary land rights from the threat of the





A leader of the Tehit-Knasaimos people celebrates the successful conclusion to a long struggle for legal recognition of his people's land rights over an area almost the size of Hong Kong. While these people in the Bird's Head Peninsula celebrate, many more Indigenous peoples of West Papua are yet to secure the same legal recognition for what ought to be their inalienable right to their ancestral lands. (06/06/2024).

Jurnasyanto Sukarno

palm oil industry was through legal channels. With the help of Greenpeace Indonesia, along with Yayasan Pusaka Bentala Rakyat, LBH Papua, and other NGOs, the Awyu people took legal action in three cases. These long-running legal battles saw the Awyu people testify in the Supreme Court, and gain nationwide interest in their cause, although in the end the Indonesian legal system put the interests of investors ahead of the Awyu people.

On the north coast of West Papua, the Namblong community has been fighting since 2019 against a company that was granted a concession for oil palm in the Grime Nawa Valley, where the Namblong people live. Collectively, the Namblong Indigenous peoples, consisting of 42 clans, want to protect their forests and the ecosystems that support them.

To amplify their efforts, Namblong Indigenous youth formed Suara Grina (Grime Nawa Voice), a citizen journalism group supported by civil organizations including Greenpeace Indonesia, to share their struggles and explore solutions. Alongside this, the Namblong Indigenous Women's Organization (ORPA) has opened a school teaching cultural traditions, their language, and the endangered art of weaving noken. Through peaceful protest actions and cultural preservation, the Namblong people are resisting the palm oil industry's encroachment and safeguarding their cultural legacy.

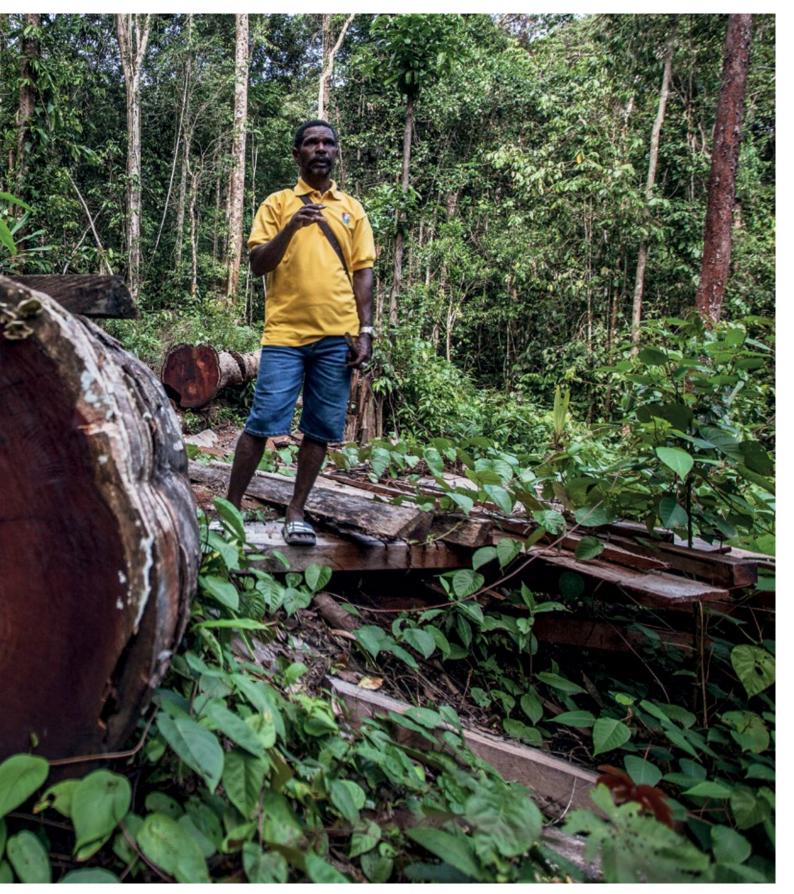


Awyu children play beneath a tree in Yare village, Boven Digoel (22/06/2023). Jurnasyanto Sukarno





Indigenous land rights activist Arkilaus Kladit of the Knasaimos-Tehit people stands alongside the trunk of a tree sustainably harvested from the forest of Sira village, South Sorong. The Sira community has chosen to use forest timber only to fulfil their own needs for building their houses and public facilities. (14/03/2018). Jurnasyanto Sukarno







Tehit-Knasaimos people dance as they celebrate legal recognition of their right to almost 100,000 hectares of ancestral land in South Sorong. Pre-existing Indigenous West Papuan law regarding land ownership was historically ignored by the Indonesian legal system, under which central and local governments offered loggers and plantation companies the right to clear forest and convert land to industrial uses. (02/09/2024).

Jurnasyanto Sukarno





In a patch of the Kalasou Valley rainforest near Sorong, light filters through a relatively sparse canopy. Young trees can wait patiently for many years until an opportunity provides enough sunlight for them to grow to their towering potential.

(6/06/2017).

Jurnasyanto Sukarno

Collaborative Empowerment with Indigenous West Papuans

Indigenous peoples play a vital role in protecting Papua's remaining forests. In recognition of this, in 2023, Greenpeace Indonesia facilitated the consolidation and strengthening of Indigenous communities in West Papua through a 'Forest Defenders Camp' (FDC). The camp accommodated more than a hundred Indigenous youth from all over West Papua. The participants shared experiences and knowledge, including how to conduct participatory mapping of customary land. They also engaged in workshops and discussions on how to maintain the sustainability of Papua's forests and their customary lands. The results of these discussions were outlined in seven demands, one of which was the rejection of all extractive companies in West Papua, along with a call for the government to immediately pass the Draft Law on Indigenous Peoples.

Separately, the Papua Legal Aid Institute (LBH Papua) has worked with Greenpeace Indonesia providing paralegal training and political education to Indigenous youth in order that they may assert their legal rights to land and environmental protection.







Tehit-Knasaimos men stand before a massive Merbau tree (Intsia sp.) during the Forest Defender Camp, organised by Greenpeace Indonesia in Sira village, South Sorong in 2023. The camp aimed to share skills and boost capacity among Indigenous youth activists from far and wide to protect West Papua's forests. (22/09/2023). Jurnasyanto Sukarno





The 2023 Forest Defender Camp took place in the Bird's Head Peninsula, with the participation of Indigenous youth from across West Papua. (21/09/2023). Jurnasyanto Sukarno





A Greenpeace Indonesia activist heads towards Lake Yuginopa through the rugged terrain of the Maoke Mountains in Lorentz National Park. (11/08/2022).

Jurnasyanto Sukarno

Preserving Sago as a Staple Food

Sago is not only a nutritious and affordable staple food for Indigenous peoples living in West Papua's lowland areas, it is also often deeply connected to lowland people's culture and land management practices. The Marind people of Merauke for example have a number of terms to mark specific life phases and characteristics of sago palm trees so they can sustainably harvest them.

Papua's lowlands, especially riverplains and freshwater swamps, are the native habitat for sago palms. It is more productive there in terms of calories per hectare than rainfed rice. This permits a larger proportion of the sago agroforestry landscape to remain forested, providing diverse plant and animal foods that can be gathered, and leaving more biodiversity intact. It is highly resistant to pests and diseases, and unlike monoculture field crops, there is no need or incentive to apply fertilisers or pesticides, with their adverse effects on biodiversity, waterways and human health.

Amidst the trend of sago being supplanted by store-bought or government-provided rice as a staple food, some communities in Papua are trying to innovate new products made with sago. Communities in the Saifi district of South Sorong are producing sago flour that can be used as raw ingredients for noodles and various snacks. To strengthen the implementation of community-based forest management, communities in South Sorong are focussing on sustainable non-timber forest products, including sago. However, in other areas, such as Asiki Village in Jair District, Boven Digoel Regency, sago forests are being squeezed by the expansion of oil palm plantations.



A traditional West Papuan delicacy, the sago grub (Rhynchophorus sp.) is a nutritious and sustainable food source. A group of Awyu people is harvesting fresh sago grubs to prepare them for today's meal. (24/06/2023).

Jurnasyanto Sukarno



An Awyu woman processes sago palm pulp in Yare village, Boven Digoel. (22/06/2023). Jurnasyanto Sukarno









Sago palm (Metroxylon sagu) plays a central role in the culture and food security of many Indigenous peoples from one end of lowland West Papua to another. Above, it is being carried by Tehit-Knasaimos women in Sira village, South Sorong, and below by Awyu women in Yare village, Boven Digoel.

Jurnasyanto Sukarno



Sago flour is extracted (above, right) by felling, splitting and rasping the pith of mature palm trunks, then pounding and leaching out the starch. (14/03/2018).

Jurnasyanto Sukarno



Walking home after collecting sago grubs during the harvest in Yoboi village, near Sentani Lake, Jayapura. (27/10/2022). Jurnasyanto Sukarno



West Papua by River and Sea

One of the best ways to visit remote areas in New Guinea is by boat. Greenpeace Indonesia has made a number of visits to West Papuan communities in this way: Greenpeace's iconic Rainbow Warrior ship first visited West Papua in 2006, followed in 2008 by another Greenpeace ship, the Esperanza, that documented illegal logging at Kaimana and on the Mamberamo River. In 2013 and 2018 the Rainbow Warrior returned again to West Papua, travelling up the Digul river to document rainforest destruction for palm oil and pulpwood plantations. Most recently in 2024 Greenpeace Indonesia activists travelled to remote communities all around the Bird's Head Peninsula and the length of the south coast as far as Merauke, on a traditional Sulawesistyle two masted Phinisi ship.

This sailing is part of a campaign to raise environmental awareness, especially among young people in remote communities. As the next generation, it is vital that West Papuan youth realise and understand the challenges faced by their communities and their environment so that they can play their role in the effort to save West Papua's unique environment and culture.







A Greenpeace Indonesia activist views the Batas Batu area, on the slopes of Ettiakup Mountain (also known in Indonesian as Trikora Mountain). The area, home to the Snow Mountain Robin (Petroica archboldi), is in the northern part of Lorentz National Park. (12/08/2022).

Jurnasyanto Sukarno



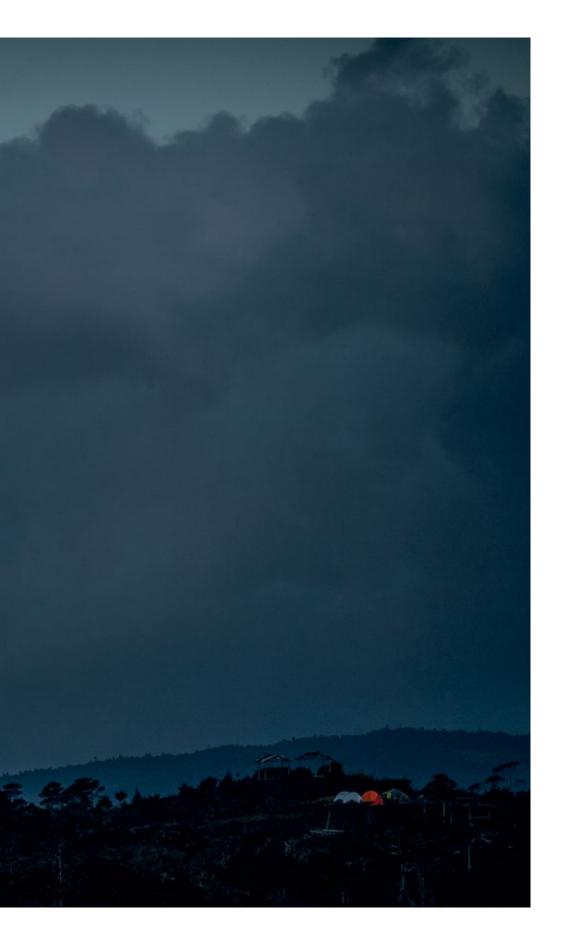
The Rainbow Warrior sails gracefully along the Digul River, one of the world's few remaining large rivers that flows uninterrupted by dams from its headwaters to the sea. (30/03/2018). *Ulet Ifansasti*





Rainbows of two different kinds arch across the water and the sky. Greenpeace's Rainbow Warrior ship sailed up the Digul River in 2018. (28/03/2018). Ulet Ifansasti





A full moon over the mountainous northeastern section of Lorentz National Park. (11/08/2022). Jurnasyanto Sukarno

EPILOGUE

West Papua is calling. Across the ancestral homelands of countless Indigenous peoples besieged by a torrent of land grabbing investment, from within landscapes being emptied of their endemic plants and animals, West Papuans are voicing their concerns. Again and again, through community meetings, via photos or the written word posted online, and where necessary through the rhythm of collective footsteps on dusty streets of towns that often feel unfamiliar.

Their voices roar, demanding to be heard by selfish ears, while unaccountable decisions are made far away from these people with an honest right to the land. Their hymn is a longing for the landscapes where their children learn and the ancient souls of their ancestors rest.

It's time to listen with our hearts. To listen not only to these Peoples' calls but also to our own inner voices, so that the splendor and wealth of Papua can uplift all who have the right to share it, steering everyone together toward a brighter future.



Tehit-Knasaimos people wear traditional dress as they call for forest protection in their ancestral lands near Sira village, South Sorong. (15/05/2024).

Jurnasyanto Sukarno





PARADISE SILENCED

On the banks of the Mappi River in Yare Village, Boven Digoel, dozens of Awyu men and women performed a joyful welcome dance. Their beaming faces and bodies were adorned with traditional motifs, and some wielded spears, bows and arrows, and salawaku shields.

The festive dance was performed to welcome a ship crewed by environmental activists and an experienced photographer. To reach the village, they had traveled by land and water, navigating the Digul River.

During this visit in June 2023, Greenpeace Indonesia's photographer, Jurnasyanto ('Jurnas') Sukarno, wanted to document the Awyu People's legal battle against the government for allowing the palm oil industry to threaten their customary land.

Faced with powerful plantation and mining companies, Indigenous Peoples and local communities in Indonesia, including those in Papua, feel alone, exhausted, as they struggle against gigantic bulldozers, monstrous chainsaws, and seemingly invincible diamond drills. They are marginalized by the idols of infrastructure.

It is not impossible that, in the future, Indigenous Papuans could share the same fate as first nations people in America or Australia: expelled and alienated from their ancestral lands. Meanwhile, large corporations hide behind unjust and heartless state policies.

Jurnas has captured these acts of resistance. Enriching the scenes immortalised by his lens are images from other photographers such as Markus Mauthe, Ulet Ifansasti, Paul Hilton, Bernard van Elegem, and Ardiles Rante. This curation is a selected set depicting the complexity of Papua's natural beauty, noble traditions, and environmental collapse.

This photography highlights humanity's responsibility: it warns the authorities about the importance of people and nature – in this case Indigenous peoples' independence and the importance of the environment in Papua. The composition of images in this photography book is not only intended to appeal to the eyes but also to touch our hearts and evoke a sense of humanity. It aims to voice the historical perspective on the future of the universe and Indigenous peoples in the years and centuries to come.

 Indigenous forestlands being cleared by a multinational company for palm oil production in Boven Digoel. (31/03/2018).
 Ulet Ifansasti Is there even a sliver of our republic's wisdom left for our children and grandchildren to inherit?

We would do well to listen to the voices of young West Papuans in a performance responding to an installation by West Papuan artist Dicky Takndare & The Sampari entitled, "AAAAHHHHH," which was explicit, bleak yet dramatic, exhibited at the Artjog 2023 event at the Jogja National Museum, Yogyakarta. The monologue was performed as follows:

Just call me Papua

I am a child of the times who refuses to vanish into extinction

I am afraid – truly afraid! That I and my people will perish

Erased, consumed by time.

Now my body is covered in wounds

Wounds inherited from my parents.

Because of the nickel in my head, Kawei is scarred.

Because of the gas in my throat, Sumuri suffers.

Because my back is a strategic location, the Abrauw in Saukobye have lost their home.

Because of the minerals in my chest the Amungme are hurt,

Because of the gold in my belly, the Moni live in the shadow of death,

And my feet are overrun by palm oil – the Awyu weep.

If only you were here,

If only you could be me,

Be us.

Oscar Motuloh

Curator

PARADISE SILENCED

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Front cover photos:

- A Hubula woman wearing a noken and a feathered headpiece. (8/08/2022). Jurnasyanto Sukarno
- Palm oil plantation in West Papua. (31/03/2018). Ulet Ifansasti



Scan this code for a song written about West Papua by Indonesia's Navicula band

