

## People and the environment at risk

UEM teams from Africa, Asia, and Germany visit partner churches in Papua and Sumatra



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## Why are church representatives travelling to Indonesia?

The United Evangelical Mission (UEM) member churches in Sumatra and Papua face great environmental and climate-related challenges; many Indonesians are already suffering massively from the consequences of environmental problems. This is why 35 delegates from German, Asian, and African churches went on ecumenical team visits to Papua and North Sumatra from 2nd to 13th May 2012. Through multi-day excursions, they were able to get an idea of the main environmental problems at each side, which are presented in this booklet. The international ecumenical meeting in Indonesia (with participants from Germany, Indonesia, Cameroon, Namibia, the Philippines, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, and Tanzania) had five key issues on the agenda: 1. land-grabbing in Papua; 2. clear-cutting of the Sumatran rainforest; 3. mining in Sumatra; 4. palm oil cultivation in Sumatra; and 5. urban pollution in Medan, the capital of the province of North Sumatra. The meetings and talks between the affected parties and the hosts provided the opportunity to exchange experiences, raise awareness of environmental issues, and support concrete steps towards sustainable economic systems at the local level that protect natural habitats and ensure the livelihood of the local population. The meeting came about at the invitation of the UEM member churches in Indonesia; Brot für die Welt and its Indonesian project partners (Lentera, Bakumsu, KSPPM) were also involved.

## What is the current local situation?

Maps from 50 years ago show Indonesia as a green oasis – the island kingdom has the third-largest rainforest in the world, after Brazil and Congo. But half of the original forest has already been destroyed, and each year another 1.8 million hectares fall victim to illegal clear-cutting and plantations. Forecasts from the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) indicate that if the destruction continues at its present rate, 98% of the rainforests will be gone or damaged by 2022. Longgena Ginting, a climate consultant for the United Evangelical Mission, has criticised the race to grab the last available pieces of land: “Even binding agreements cannot prevent the sell-off. All too often, financial interests and corruption have the upper hand.” In addition to the natural consequences – species extinction, landslides, and floods – there are also dire social ones: whole villages are uprooted, and people lose their livelihoods. Corruption and a lack of rule of law facilitate the destruction. “The government is kissing the feet of investors”, former Indonesian environment minister Sonny Keraf thundered during the international ecumenical team meeting. “Political leaders need money for their next election campaign, business leaders help them out, and the politicians repay their generosity with land concessions.”



UEM Management Team member Dr Jochen Motte (left) with Petrus Khariseb of Namibia and Juliet Solis of the Philippines at the workshop in Sumatra.

## How is the UEM involved in Indonesia?

Along with their social projects (such as projects for orphaned children in Sumatra and Nias, reconciliation work with Muslim neighbours, and projects for the disabled in Sumatra), twelve UEM member churches in Indonesia are also taking a stand to protect the environment and the climate. For example, the churches are speaking out against land-grabbing at the political level, helping farmers who have lost their land to build a future, and, when necessary, bringing legal action against the corporations. They are also supporting civil society at the regional and international level through training, education, and opportunities for networking. “This visit by the ecumenical team to Papua and Sumatra has led us to encounter people who were made victims of human rights violations and driven off their land by the aggressive progress of deforestation, the expansion of palm oil plantations, and mining. We have seen how those affected can fight against these developments at the local level with help from our partners and other civil-society groups. And we in the UEM communion in Africa, Asia, and Germany will continue to stand in solidarity with the churches in Indonesia. We are helped by the experience of our member churches in Africa and Indonesia, who are facing the same phenomena that we encounter in Papua and Sumatra. Together we can develop strategies and give each other strength and support to advocate for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.”

*Jochen Motte*

## Land rights are human rights

The deceptive acquisition of land, or land-grabbing, has always been an instrument of power. The only thing new about the hunt for land that has been underway since 2007 by foreign investors and national elites is that the extent of the land rights violations has become far greater. What is more, the agricultural production of raw materials – foodstuffs, animal feed, and fuel – and the land needed for such production has become an object of global speculation on the stock market. The boom in investment began with steep rises in the price of rice, maize, and wheat in 2008 and stabilised with the acquisition of land as a lucrative investment in times of international financial and economic crisis.

World Bank figures show that some 47 million hectares of land were sold or leased in 2009 alone – an area the size of all the farmland in Australia. Oxfam estimates that between 2001 and 2011, some 227 million hectares of land fell prey to land-grabbing, an area about as large as western Europe. In the last three years, most of this land has been taken from countries in the global South, above all in Africa. Investors – including Goldman Sachs, DWS Invest Global Agrobusiness (Deutsche Bank), and parties from China, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, India, South Korea and Japan – find marvellous conditions to suit their goals there: large areas of land, few (land) rights for the local population, low prices, willing authorities, and weak governments.

The local population's access to land and water is blocked off; large amounts of pesticides and fertilisers pollute the waters or make them unusable. Contracts between the government and investors are usually kept secret. This promotes corruption and limits the participation of the local population in decision-making processes. Land-grabbing contravenes human rights: the right to life; to social security in the form of access to water, food, and shelter; the right to participation in cultural and public life; to self-determination; to development. The majority of nations have ratified the relevant international human rights agreements and have committed to implementing these rights – even in the form of extraterritorial obligations, meaning that the States Parties.

*Theodor Rathgeber*





*Extract from paradise: the Papuan village of Kaliki has just leased 14,000 hectares of land to an investor – for a ridiculously low price.*



*Matius gave up his land and got a mobile in exchange – but he cannot make calls in his village.*



*In Batang Toru, the UEM delegation spoke with the CSR manager from the G-Resource mining company, which began mining for gold in July 2012.*

## 1. Land-grabbing

In times like these, with raw materials becoming scarce, corporations are engaged in a race for the last available pieces of land. A few years back, this run on land reached Papua: the western part of the island of Papua New Guinea, which officially belongs to Indonesia. In August 2010, the Indonesian agricultural ministry started the agricultural megaproject of MIFEE (Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate), which is intended to transform 1.2 million hectares of land around the South Papuan city of Merauke into megaplantations. By 2011, 36 investors had already received concessions to cultivate wood, sugar cane, maize, and soya beans. Kristina Neubauer, the former coordinator of the West Papua Network (WPN) and the Faith-Based Network on West Papua (FBN) and the current advisor on partnerships for the UEM, estimates that in 10 to 20 years, Papua will be as devastated as Sumatra.

The question of land ownership is highly contested in Indonesia. From the point of view of the government, the land belongs to the state – unless it can be proven through a lease that a private party is the legal owner. But this practically never happens, since such documents were hardly ever issued in the past, and today the land authorities usually refuse to issue common-law leases retroactively. This way the government can lease the land to the highest-bidding investor at its own discretion.

Since Jakarta does not recognise the Papuans as an indigenous people, the government also disregards the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which stipulates that such peoples must give their “free, prior, and informed consent” (FPIC). On their visit to two villages near Merauke, the UEM delegation learned how the Papuans were roundly outmanoeuvred by an investor. Under pressure from the Rajawali raw materials corporation, which intends to cultivate

sugar cane as part of the MIFEE project, the Papuans leased out thousands of hectares of land, including their ancestors’ resting places and other holy sites – for a fraction of the going market rate. Only four clan leaders assented, with far-reaching consequences for the future of the 600 inhabitants, and these leaders did not take a free and informed decision either: the contract agents arrived unannounced, persuaded the leaders to sign without reading the letter of the contract, and did not leave a copy for the village.

## Recommendations for UEM member churches

- Inform and educate the local populace about the consequences of land-grabbing and the possibilities for action, e.g. by establishing a local radio station
- Provide training in agriculture, e.g. livestock holding for youth and young adults
- Establish an international church group partnership for mutual reinforcement and support
- Establish alliances to strengthen the indigenous peoples affected by the MIFEE project
- Exchange information within the UEM member churches, develop joint strategies, and lobby against land-grabbing.



## 2. Clearing of the rainforest (Sumatra)

The sustainable management of the storax forests in Sumatra has a long tradition: for over 300 years, the native inhabitants have recovered the fragrant benzoin resin from the bark of the tree, which is used as incense, in perfume manufacture, as a preservative, and as a violin varnish. The forest not only provides for its inhabitants’ survival, but is also a part of their spirituality, culture, and history. But in the early 1990s, the Indonesian government granted a concession to cellulose corporation PT. Toba Pulp Lestari (PT. TPL) to clear forests in Sumatra – including the storax forests. The local protests escalated when TPL began felling hundreds of thousands of hectares of forests, polluting the Asahan River and damaging the ecosystem of the largest crater lake in the world, Lake Toba. The cellulose factory was forced to close in 1998, as a result of the protests, but it was reopened in 2002.

## Recommendations for UEM member churches

- Undertake lobbying (by churches and civil society) in Indonesia to maintain the forests and their traditional use
- Engage in international lobbying, e.g. through talks with political and economic decision-makers in the EU
- Discuss the topic of deforestation within the UEM partnerships
- Promote forest protection and reforestation programmes

## 3. Mining (Sumatra)

Indonesia is one of the leading global producers of tin, coal, and copper, but gold and nickel are also important raw materials. Mining makes up a good tenth of the Indonesian gross national product. For a few years now, gold has been one of the materials extracted in North Sumatra through opencast mining. The surrounding landscape has changed dramatically in the process: before the corporations begin their work, the rainforest is cleared so that streets and other infrastructure can be built. Cyanide-laced production waste gets piled into towering slag heaps. Because it takes 18 tonnes of iron ore to extract enough gold for one wedding ring, the amounts of toxic waste are enormous. During the team’s visit, residents of the Batang Toru region lamented the lowering of the water table, the drought, the street noise, and the accidents – all of which occurred before the mine started operations. Both there and in Dairi, the UEM delegations could observe how the community and the churches had ruptured into supporters and sceptics.

## Recommendations for UEM member churches

- Educate about the negative consequences of mining
- Train those affected to defend their own interests (empowerment)
- Provide legal aid to those affected with the goal of taking legal action against health and environmental damage
- Establish a team of independent observers to look into complaints and raise awareness about these – with the help of the churches.

*A frequent sight in Sumatra. When the forest and its inhabitants die, so do the hopes of the indigenous population.*



## 4. Palm oil cultivation (Sumatra)

In Indonesia, you can spend hours driving past palm oil plantations – massive promotion has made Indonesia into the largest palm oil producer in the world, with over 20 million tonnes on over 9 million hectares of land. The government plans to double these yields by 2020. The expansion of the monoculture brings some workers a steady income, but women and their children must usually work alongside them without pay in order for them to make their daily quota. The regions of cultivation – originally shaped by rainforest and self-sustaining agriculture – are changing dramatically. Water is becoming more scarce, and the pesticides and herbicides are worsening its quality. Floods and erosion are occurring, temperatures are rising, and the soil is becoming infertile. With the loss of the original biodiversity, knowledge of the diversity of animal and plant species and their uses is disappearing too: native peoples are seeing their livelihoods at risk and are increasingly relying on imported foodstuffs. Megaplantations also receive concessions for land that has been inhabited for centuries, and this creates conflicts. In 2010, when state corporation PTPN IV came to the region to set up new palm oil plantations, paramilitaries set fire to homes in the villages of Sukaramai in Sumatra; in a second attack, one resident was killed and several others were severely injured. Now without land, the former farmers of Sukaramai live in a temporary camp amidst the plantations, without the most basic necessities. The situation escalated further in July 2012, when police arrested 17 Sukaramai farmers. Local NGO Lentera, a partner of Brot für die Welt, is supporting Sukaramai and 26 other villages in the region.

## Recommendations for UEM member churches

- Stop the expansion of palm oil plantations; check existing plantations against social and ecological criteria
- Encourage UEM member churches that own their own plantations to be a model to other owners through sustainable economic management
- Start a dialogue with plantation owners and call upon them to improve working conditions, use less pesticide, and diversify their plantations
- Strengthen EU involvement vis-a-vis the Indonesian government in protecting the tropical rainforest, as well as church lobbying work for an overhaul of the EU Fuel Directive of 2009.
- Discuss resource usage, e.g. through consumption, within UEM member churches.



*Wild refuse dumps present a health risk for Medan residents.*



*Their future is at stake: indigenous children in Papua.*



*Delegates from the UEM workshop (l to r: Christian Sandner, Kristina Neubauer, Christina Felschen) talk with residents of Domande village about the motives for giving up their land and the consequences of doing so.*

## 5. Urban pollution (Medan/Sumatra)

As the third-largest city in Indonesia, with 2.8 million inhabitants, Medan exhibits the typical environmental problems of a metropolis in the global South. Along with the air pollution from industry and vehicles, which leads to respiratory diseases, a central problem in Medan is rubbish. Waste prevention, recycling, and composting do not exist here; wild rubbish dumps on roadsides and in the Deli River are hotbeds of germs, even as residents fish, wash, and swim in the river. At the largest refuse dump in Medan, Namo Bintang, 700 families search for rubbish they can use; they have no other jobs. Although they try to protect themselves with boots and gloves as best they can, their work is extremely dangerous. Three children have already died in accidents at the dump; sharp objects, toxins, and flies bring health problems.

## Recommendations for UEM member churches

- Introduce local awareness programmes through UEM member churches aimed at Medan residents, to show them the other side of their city: city tours, river trips, and tours through refuse dumps
- Discuss waste prevention and waste usage in the work of the churches
- Provide diaconic aid for people who live in and of rubbish – e.g. through health care and medical aid
- Develop alternative vocational opportunities in tandem with families, such as manufacturing and selling new products made from rubbish

## Summary

The participants in the workshop encouraged churches to take more political responsibility. In their closing declaration ([www.ve mission.org/peace-with-the-earth](http://www.ve mission.org/peace-with-the-earth)), they appealed to churches all over the world to advocate for those who face threats from land-grabbing and the destruction of their livelihoods. “When our brothers and sisters suffer under an unjust economic situation, we are called upon to liberate them and make them stronger”, said Bishop Stephen Ismail Munga (North Eastern Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania). “I saw and heard people who were oppressed by their own government. Their cries were not heard because personal advantages were worth more to the government than the lives of their voters. Their cries are God’s call to us to help them get their property and their dignity back.”

»We are allowed to live from nature, but we must not consume and destroy it«, urged Indonesian pastor Matias Panji Barus of the Karo Batak Protestant Church, referring to the story of creation. As UEM Management Team member Jochen Motte summarised, “We have encountered people who fell victim to human rights violations and were driven off their land by the aggressive progress of logging, the expansion of palm oil plantations, and mining. We have seen how those affected can fight against these developments at the local level with the help of our partners.” Motte promised that the UEM community would continue to support its member churches by standing up for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.

The participants also had a critical message for the churches in many countries that maintain their own relationships with controversial companies – like the Indonesian churches linked to palm oil plantations and paper factories: “Churches should not accept any donations from companies that violate human rights”, said Petrus Sugito, the General Secretary of the GKJTU church in Indonesian Java. Sugito, together with

the other delegates, called for an appropriate code of conduct. Rannieh Mercado, director of the UEM Asia office in Medan, fears that “if things continue as they are, within a few years our forests will have become paper and plantations, the water will be polluted, and the small farmers will have no land. Then our children will ask us: What did the church do in this situation?”



*Stronger together: Richard Madete, UEM climate consultant (right), and a resident of Sidamanik, a tea-growing village in North Sumatra.*



*The ghosts of memory: Sukaramai, Tumino’s village, was burned to the ground by paramilitaries in 2010.*

*Lentera staff member Kartika Manurung campaigns for the residents of Sukaramai – and negotiates with the state ministry here on behalf of the Medan region’s farmers.*





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## Publications

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