

Indonesian churches and civil society in Sumatra demand: “PT Toba Pulp Lestari must be shut down!”

Book presentation “The Cry of the Batak Land” and a clear message from Laguboti

(Wuppertal/Laguboti, July 16, 2025) - On July 14, more than 150 representatives of churches, civil society, science, and Batak farming and indigenous communities gathered in the town of Laguboti near Lake Toba on the Indonesian island of Sumatra for the presentation of the book “Jeritan Bona Pasogit” (in English: “The Cry of the Batak Land”). The event, organized by the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI) and the United Evangelical Mission (UEM), focused on a clear appeal: the closure of the pulp company PT Toba Pulp Lestari (TPL).

Massive environmental damage caused by pulp mill

The book is the result of months of joint research and documents the massive environmental damage caused by TPL around Lake Toba, such as deforestation and water pollution, as well as the consequences of the loss of traditional livelihoods. Pastor Dr. J.P. Robinsar Siregar, co-author of the book, described the dramatic impact of the company's activities on the population, especially women and indigenous groups.

According to data from the North Sumatra Environmental Agency, only about 12% of the forest area around Lake Toba remains today. Arie Rompas, forest campaigner at Greenpeace Southeast Asia, criticized TPL's close ties to the Royal Golden Eagle Group. He described TPL as part of an opaque shadow corporation that systematically evades responsibility for ecological destruction through a network of companies. The company is not only conducting its environmentally damaging activities at Lake Toba, but also on a large scale at other locations in Sumatra and Kalimantan – both known for their great biodiversity.

“The book is not a conclusion, but a tool for the churches to continue their work to protect creation,” said Irma Simanjuntak, Advocacy Officer for UEM Asia region. Prof. Dr. Posma Sibuea called for an ecological rethink in consumption and production patterns. Alfian R. Komimbin (PGI) emphasized: “The ecological crisis is not just a technical problem, but a spiritual one. It affects our relationship with the whole of creation.”

Three demands from the Sumatra churches

Leading church representatives were particularly emphatic. Bishop Firman Sibarani of the HKI Church demanded that the land be returned to the people: "It must not be plundered, but preserved and passed on."

In conclusion, Pastor Walden Sitanggang of the Catholic Church read out the joint statement of the churches of North Sumatra. With calm determination, he summed up the pain and hope of the affected communities: "When land, water, and air are destroyed out of greed, God's creation is desecrated. The Church must not remain silent."

The church leaders therefore demand:

1. The permanent closure of PT Toba Pulp Lestari by President Prabowo Subianto.
2. Legal protection for all employees of the company following the closure.
3. Support from the governor and local political decision-makers in Sumatra in enforcing these demands together with the churches and the population.

About "UEM"

The United Evangelical Mission (UEM) is an international and equal community with 39 members, including 38 Protestant churches in Africa and Asia and Germany as well as the v. Bodelschwinghschen Foundations Bethel.

With offices in Germany, Indonesia, and Tanzania, UEM pursues a holistic understanding of mission that goes beyond spiritual proclamation. At its core is a commitment to people in need and disadvantaged people with the aim of improving their living conditions, respecting their dignity, and valuing their cultural context.