

# The Poor Blame Transnationals and Government for Impoverishing The Nation

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Hundreds of people organised under the Indonesian Poor People's Union (SRMI) carried out protests at offices of foreign-owned oil and mining companies to denounce various government's anti-poor policies resulting from foreign domination of the country's natural wealth.

In Makassar, South Sulawesi, hundreds of SRMI members, many of whom were lower class housewives with their small children, joined a demonstration on Tuesday April 22 in front of the giant nickel producer, Inco-Vale, subsidiary office to protest government's policy of substituting kerosene for natural gas.

They carried empty containers and banners written with slogans like "Stop Abusing The Poor", "Take Control Over Oil and Reject Substituting Kerosene for Gas", "Without Kerosene The People Suffer", "Fuel Price Hike Equals Suffering People".

Kerosene is a cheap oil derivative widely used by the poor mostly for cooking and the government has tried to keep its price low despite the constantly increasing fuel price as an effort to dampen people's discontent.

After a couple of speeches condemning the policy, protesters marched for half a kilometer to a Fuel Distribution Unit installation owned by the state's oil company, Pertamina.

Pertamina's representative came out to tell the crowd that the plan to substitute kerosene for natural gas in South Sulawesi was postponed until the beginning of 2009.

On Wednesday April 23, about 500 people from SRMI held a protest in front of ExxonMobil headquarter in the capital, Jakarta, condemning the transnational as an exploiter of the country's economy and natural wealth and for draining the state resource needed for subsidizing social services.

They called the government to nationalize foreign-owned extraction industry to provide universal health and education services as well as cheap basic goods.

"The government has sold out its natural wealth to the United States, they lied to the poor. They said the poor will get quality education and cheap basic goods, but Susilo Bambang (President) and Jusuf Kalla (VP) lied to us," said Soleh, the protest leader.

## North Sumatran Students and Peasants in Solidarity with Urban Poor

In Siantar, North Sumatra, the Siantar Hotel management carried out a forcible eviction against peddlers by placing huge stones on the place where they use to sell food to make their living.

The arbitrary move was answered by a protest on Monday April 21, involving hundreds of peddlers supported by students groups like LMND, BEM SI, BEM HUKUM and peasants organisation like

STN and JTR at the Siantar Municipal and Parliament.

They demanded government's responsibility to protect the peddlers from unjust act carried against them and threatened to kick the mayor out of office if he does not respond to peddlers' grievance.

Eventually, representatives of the peddlers were received by the Mayor who then promised to take firm measure against the hotel management's unjustified act.

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