

# Popular struggle in Indonesia: the spirit of Bandung

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**In this article, Frans Ari Prasetyo exposes the contradictions of the Jokowi government's dependence on the World Bank and local capitalists. The article looks at the protest movement that erupted when the Global Land Forum was hosted by the Indonesian government in the city of Bandung. It analyses the policies that resulted in this movement, and how it evokes the spirit of the 1955 Bandung congress.**



## Introduction

Every two-three years, the International Land Coalition (ILC) organises the Global Land Forum (GLF). This unique event brings together ILC members and other stakeholders from grassroots organisations, activists, local and international NGOs, and researchers, to multilateral organisations and government agencies from around the world to advance understanding of the complex and dynamic political, economic, environmental and social linkages between land governance, food security, poverty and democracy. [1]

After the last Global Land Forum in [Senegal](#), the city of [Bandung](#) in Indonesia was chosen for the 2018 conference. Ever since the Asian-African Conference in 1955, Bandung has become an icon among land activists across the global South. The original conference was the first of its kind, bringing together nations across Asia and Africa with the aim of asserting sovereignty and independence from all forms of colonialism and imperialism. [2]

Throughout the period in which the GLF has been meeting, the basic reasons for its existence have continually reasserted themselves. Agrarian conflicts, land grabbing and the eviction of people's land for various business, capital and corporate interests continue apace, while the goal of agrarian reform has never actually been implemented. At the local level, numerous peasant organizations have been increasingly weakened, rural and urban communities' land tenure security has been increasingly threatened and agrarian conflicts have been increasingly and massively occurring due to land grabbing.



Aggressive infrastructure projects in Indonesia has urbanised swathes of agricultural lands for property development. This in turn has given rise to new forms of inequality in land tenure, segregation and gentrification, displacing previous inequalities produced by huge plantation and large scale agriculture interests. In human terms, land grabs mean real people and families are dispossessed. When people lose access to their land, they also lose their means to obtain food and work, and their communities and cultures are dislocated. These considerations raise critical issues about the implementation of the GLF, raised above all by the people's movement for agrarian reform in Indonesia.

GLF is a biennial international forum organized by the [International Land Coalition](#) (ILC). The ILC was founded in 1995 and initially named the [Popular Coalition to Eradicate Hunger and Poverty](#). Its membership now consists of non-government organizations (NGOs), peasants/community unions, regional NGOs, research institutions, associations of agriculture producers as well as a number of international, multilateral and transnational institutions. The [World Bank](#) is one of the ILC's 21 initial founding institutions, besides several donor institutions based in the US and Europe, institutions representing European Commission and European Union, United Nations institutions, three civil society organizations and one agricultural producer association.

Currently, the ILC [consists](#) of 206 members located in 78 countries including in Indonesia. Its Indonesian membership includes the Consortium for Agrarian Reform (Konsorsium Pembangunan Agraria/KPA). [KPA](#) have 68 NGOs and 85 civil society organisations across Indonesia, the majority of whom represent peasants in rural areas. However, the peasants rarely know the relationship between the KPA and the ILC, because it is an elite network.

If we refer to KPA's [annual report from 2017](#), we find 659 land disputes covering 520,491.87 hectares of land. These land disputes can be broken down into conflicts in the plantation sector (208 instances), the property sector (199 instances), the infrastructure sector (94 instances), the agriculture sector (78 instances), the forestry sector (30 instances), the coastal/marine sector (28 instances) and in the mining sector (22 instances).

In many instances the very stakeholders involved in the GLF are directly or indirectly giving financial stimulus, engaged in the conflicts or carrying out land liberalization, raising serious questions about the legitimacy of the entire project.

### **GLF and the agrarian reform agenda**

On 20 October 2014, Joko 'Jokowi' Widodo was inaugurated as the seventh president of Indonesia. The new president came to power with a national development agenda called Nawacita, consisting of nine development priorities:

1. Returning the state to its task of protecting all citizens and providing a safe environment
2. Developing clean, effective, trusted and democratic governance
3. Developing Indonesia's rural areas

4. Reforming law enforcement agencies
5. Improving quality of life
6. Increasing productivity and competitiveness
7. Promoting economic independence by developing domestic strategic sectors
8. Overhauling the character of the nation
9. Strengthening the spirit of 'unity in diversity' and social reform.

These were then translated into the 2015-2019 National Mid-Term Development Plan. For the Indonesian government, the GLF presents an arena in which the President Jokowi can raise issues of land reform in the context of increasingly massive agrarian conflicts. While this presents an opportunity to promote genuine agrarian reforms aimed to redress the unequal land tenure structure, the reality is that Indonesia has been quick to embrace pro-market global land policies.

These policies are driven by private investment and corporate involvement. The Agrarian Reform Program no longer aims to reduce inequality of land tenure, let alone abolish land control monopolies. The opening of the GLF in Bandung on 24 September 2018 coincided with the 58<sup>th</sup> Indonesian Peasants' Day, a reminder of the peasant movements of the 1950s-60s. [3] However, the GLF is setting a very different agenda. The 2018 GLF provided an opportunity for the launch of the Presidential Regulation on Agrarian Reform Acceleration; [4] predictably, the regulation was the main star in the 2018 GLF.

The regulation will be the basis for '[Satu Peta/One Map](#)'. The idea of One Map for Indonesia aims to digitize data and information related to primary and secondary forests, including peatlands, on a single public portal, synchronized with data on licenses attached to the land area, with the urgent aim of eliminating duplicate licenses issued for the same land area. This regulation provides the legal basis to support the Indonesian government's program of agrarian reform, financially supported by an International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) loan from the World Bank Group. As a part of capital's push to open up the nations to easier exploitation, onerous conditions were forced on farmers and the urban poor in countries that either voluntarily signed agreements or were forced to accept.

The One Map programme is responsible for accelerating agrarian reforms. It has been funded by a loan of US \$ 200 million, which is being overseen by the Ministry of Land Affairs. The main objective is to help land users gain clarity and security in terms of accessibility and ownership to lands and natural resources. There are 126 million parcels of land in Indonesia, of which only 51 million have been certificated.

This raises several questions: what is the purpose of this land titling program? Given that the loan is based on the state's ability to pay, what happens if the loan is insufficient? Who pays for the loan?

Logically, if one borrowed from a conventional commercial bank with one's land certificate as collateral, that would turn it into one of the bank's assets and they would be able to confiscate and take over the land in the event of a default. This shift in *de facto* ownership raises the issue of whether the whole programme is part of the process of land liberalization in Indonesia and of global capital to create a land market in the country.

The World Bank loan is, at the same time, evidence that Indonesian government is not yet ready to legalize and re-distribute assets using the government state budget, and thus must rely on loans. According to several interviews in the mass media, KPA itself had questions about the World Bank loan. A specific concern lay in the fact that agrarian reform will not cover all components of the debt solely through land reform. Which raises the question: if the World Bank loan project is not for speeding up agrarian reform or even land registration and map making, then why does World Bank

lend debt to Indonesia? Indirectly this places the 2018 Bandung GLF event coordinated by KPA in a contradiction.

Agrarian reform should be an important foundation in development because it could provide the basis for reshaping the economy. With a common comprehension of the new form of society, agrarian land reform would clarify land use, access rights, and licenses. The problem is how this vision to reformulate Indonesian society is implicated in the World Bank's loan. A project notionally about reducing poverty and income inequality will in practice result in land liberalization. Projects based on donor or loan driven certification is one of the phenomenal forms liberal capitalism can take, and it will exacerbate inequality in landownership.

Thus, we can examine the intended beneficiaries of the agrarian reform program in Indonesia. For instance, the 'Land Object of Agrarian Reform' (*Tanah Obyek Reforma Agraria*) continually fails to target lands that are currently monopolized by a small group of people. These lands are used by private and state-owned companies for large-scale palm-oil and rubber plantations, and to serve the timber industry, mining, National Parks and the State Forest Company. According to the [2017 annual report](#) of KPA, large-scale control of agrarian resources characterised almost all sectors. As much as 71% of land is controlled by forestry companies, 16% is controlled by plantation companies, 7% is controlled by the rich, leaving only 6% to the poor majority. As a result, 10% of the richest people control 77% of national wealth. The land is seen as a resource for investment, which exacerbates inequalities in land ownership, where the average acreage for tillers is less than 0.3 hectares spread between around 17.10 million people who live in rural areas.

Additionally, forest areas are monopolized by various companies and groups who now control 57 million hectares out of a total of 132 million hectares. From this data alone, forest tenure for corporations, that has been granted Forest Concession Rights cover an area of 25 million hectares for 303 companies, and Industrial Forest (Hutan Tanaman Industri, HTI) covering an area of 10.1 million hectares for 262 companies. Furthermore, palm-oil plantations cover 12.3 million hectares and are controlled by 1,605 companies, while the mining sector covers 3.2 million hectares controlled by 1,755 companies. This condition clearly shows extreme inequalities in land tenure, especially by small holder peasant, fishermen and or urban-rural poor.

In the Jokowi era, economic infrastructure has been boosted, while democratic infrastructure has been crushed and subverted. We can see from the agrarian conflicts occurring in the infrastructure sector in Indonesia. Based on 2017 KPA data, there were 94 agrarian conflicts took place in this sector, which ranks third after the plantation sector and the luxury housing sector. Likewise, in terms of the extent of area covered by conflicts over infrastructure, it also ranked third after forestry and plantations with 52,607.9 hectares. These conflicts resulted in casualties and violence result in 520 men and 72 women dead or wounded. The majority of conflicts occurred where civilians tried to defend their land which has been their source of livelihood.

It can be concluded that the concept of developmentism still works on the basis of supporting 'Agrarian Reforms' whose true purpose is to facilitate the entry of capital, and to increase the rate of economic growth. In other words, the agrarian reform carried out by the Indonesian government today is to prepare for large-scale land tenure and concentration of ownership. Hence, it would be perfectly logical if we continue to see evictions, along with the criminalization of peasants and the urban poor. This leaves us to question who benefits.

The GLF itself, in the national context, was used by the Jokowi government as a political stage to exhibit its 'success' in carrying out agrarian reforms which based solely on the quantity of land distribution and land certificate distribution. With the World Bank loan, this agrarian reform agenda is no longer a program targeted to reinforce rights to land. After successfully building a loan

commitment and building physical infrastructure as support for foreign direct investment, the next stage would indeed require massive land certification to facilitate land grabbing process.

It is worth at this point stressing the links between the implementation of agrarian reform and loan assistance in the context of the 2019 Election. The Bandung GLF was drawn into this process. The ratification of Regulation on Agrarian Reform Acceleration on Peasants' Day at the opening of GLF only served political interests of the current ruling regime. In addition, if we look at the timeframe for its ratification, this was inextricable from the timeframe agreed with the World Bank for repaying the loan agreement. The government requires a legal umbrella to spend the loan funds that would be immediately disbursed. While the Indonesian GLF participants cheered, they did not acknowledge the cost to peasants in complying with the terms of the World Bank's loan.

### **GLF and eviction in Bandung**

It is worth considering the local context of Bandung as host city. During his five-year tenure as mayor (2013-18), Ridwan Kamil oversaw a large number of evictions have occurred. Despite its beautiful parks and luxury apartments, Bandung been built by displacing a thousand people from the urban kampung area and assigning them to slum areas. Furthermore, the private property development company Bandung Teknopark has been busy converting productive agricultural land into real estate. Somehow the GLF organizers have failed to take note of these dynamics.

Just as in the case of national government, so we see the government of Bandung City using the 2018 GLF for showcasing Kamil's success, now he has been elected to the grander post of Governor of West Java. The key here was in presenting Bandung as an investor-friendly city, while trying to preserve the facade that it is a city which respects human rights and has completed the slum revitalization project under the [KOTAKU](#) program, overseen by the Ministry of Public Works and People's Housing, again sponsored by loans from the [World Bank](#). [5] Of course, it is a facade which masks the realities of evictions and displacements.

A total of four urban kampungs have disappeared from the original city map during Kamil's period of administration. In 2015, Kampung Kolase and a kampung in Karawang Street were evicted. Both locations underwent eviction to be transformed into recreational areas for other citizens (especially for luxurious housing and terrace parks), while some of those who previously lived there were forced to move to flats (*rumah susun*), which was no guarantee to access to new jobs at the same standard as those they had to leave behind. The majority of evicted were scattered to other urban kampungs and forced to rebuild their lives, which entailed finding new settlements, and starting from scratch with no compensation and no social safety net from the government.

The 2016 eviction happened in the Kebon Jeruk area in quite center of Bandung, eliminating all of residents' houses and sources of income. While since 2017, people in in Taman Sari area have still continued to struggle until this day. The two cases mentioned have eliminated the social and spatial collective memory of its residents. Almost simultaneously with the Taman Sari Case, people in Dago Elos have been subjected to land grabbing practices. They have to been evicted from their homes by force and violence. Strange how all this has been happening under the nose of the 2018 GLF.

Meanwhile debates in the city around development have paid great attention to approaches that centre on the issue of tenure security. [6] Landholders should be protected against involuntary removal from the land on which they reside, unless through due process of law and payment of proper compensation – but in practice, no such protection exists in Bandung.

It is this mismatch between image and reality, which turns the GLF into a spectacle given to the public. The GLF theatre is an international performance ritual, using agrarian reform symbols.



Under the theme of 'United for Land Rights, Peace and Justice', the 2018 GLF provided a spectacle that purportedly aimed to promote land governance to overcome inequality, poverty, agrarian conflict, ecological damage, human rights violations and rural development. On the other hand the theme is also closely related to the interests of the owners and rulers of world financial capital to build a global financial infrastructure and system that can better guarantee investment opportunities in developing countries. The GLF was attended by around 550 participants from 84 countries from various governments, non-governmental organizations, and civil society groups.

### **Bandung, GLF-ILC-WorldBank Protest**

It is perhaps no accident that the GLF attracted protests by those living in Bandung affected by marketisation of land, gentrification and slum clearances. The People's Alliance Against Eviction (*Aliansi Rakyat Anti Penggusuran/ARAP*) was a key player in these protests. The alliance was formed in 2014 and consists of individuals, collectives, communities, student associations, NGOs, and independent media groups who have developed a clear set of statements against eviction and land-grabbing. In contrast to the GLF committee, ARAP is not in any way affiliated with the government and is independent of international donor agencies such as the World Bank.

The initial protests were held a month before the GLF opening in Bandung. ARAP used their media resources to produce a poster parodying the 2018 GLF poster by changing its theme from 'United for Land Rights, Peace and Justice' to 'United for Land Grabs, Eviction and Neoliberalism'. The poster changed the GLF logo of three men to three skulls, while still maintaining the tree figure shading them. Besides that, they also stated 5 main statements explaining why the Global Land Forum in Bandung must be rejected. After this statement was published, ARAP issued a 10-page worksheet exposing the Global Land Forum, its history, networks, stakeholders and work practices showing how they were linked to the way the World Bank had captured the agrarian reform agenda in Indonesia. [7] In particular, the worksheet pointed out the links between the GLF and land-grabbing in the city.

ARAP is also supported by other public alliances, including the Bandung Supporter Alliance (BSA). BSA is a union of football supporters, the majority of which support Bandung city football club, and live in the Kampung directly affected by the evictions. They have participated in the protests extending its reach into areas with some of the highest levels of poverty.

On 24 September 2018, the Global Land Forum was officially opened in Gedung Merdeka, Bandung. Despite the absence of President Jokowi, the forum sought to capitalise on holding its opening on National Peasants' Day. This was the day on which the 1960 Agrarian Law (Basic Agrarian Law, BAL) was passed which formed the basis for land laws in Indonesia, and should (in principle) be the main foundation for agrarian reform taking place today.

On the opening day of GLF, the ARAP were joined by other groups to stage mass protests. At first it appeared that there was a light police presence, but when the ARAP column was about to enter Asia Afrika Street and was still 100 meters away from Gedung Merdeka, they confronted three layers of dozens of armed police officers. This was in spite the fact that the protesters did not pose any threat to the police, the public or the participants of the GLF.

The general feeling among the protesters was that they had gained momentum at Gedung Merdeka. They had exposed the GLF, the World Bank and their Indonesian and local government's complicity in abusing the discourse of agrarian reform and the using national Peasant's Day to stage a charade. In doing this they invoked the spirit of the 1955 Asian-African Conference and in homage to the ten-point declaration of the earlier conference developed their own ten point principles.

This document opens with the statement: 'Let a New World be born in Bandung for a genuine land reform, not land grabs!' detailing the ten principles:

1. Respect human rights and related rights specifically on land control and ownership for the rural and urban poor as indicated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards and instruments.
2. Respect people's sovereignty over land, territory and living space for all citizens.
3. Stand up for equality of access to land and for guarantees of land rights for the rural and urban poor and the landless.
4. Resist the concentration of land control by corporations, as well by the State where it is not used to advance the lives of the poor both in rural and urban areas in accordance with the principles of advancement of economic, social and cultural rights.
5. Support the people's struggle to gain their economic, social and cultural rights, including the fight for and in defence of rights over land.
6. Respect the rights of self-determination, rights of the citizens to self-defence whether an individual or collective struggles.
7. Engage the civilian defence scheme collectively to act in certain circumstances to fight against neoliberal regimes, especially to defend the rights over land.
8. Resist authoritarian regimes including populist-authoritarian governments, which collaboratively work together with the international, national and local neoliberal agencies, and the results of whose work appears in the form of policies, legal instruments, and programs that threaten people's rights over land and territories as sources of livelihood and cultural life.
9. Refuse all neoliberal rural development and agrarian reform especially those directed by loans from the international finance institutions.
10. Promote and implement agrarian reform and the resolution of agrarian conflicts on the basis of social justice, agrarian justice, emancipatory, equality and collective

Land conflicts between farmers, urban poor, plantation owners, mining companies and developers have raged across Indonesia as local, multinational and transnational companies have been encouraged to seize lands, deforest customary lands and evict people in the urban kampungs—especially where these reside on land and housing owned by people and administered in accordance with their customs.

Communities are turning against the capitalist forces behind these moves, identifying them as *tujuh setan desa*, the 'seven village devils who suck the blood of the peasants'. These village devils are the landlords, usurers, advance purchasers of crops, middlemen, bureaucratic capitalists (those who use government resources to pressure peasants to sell their products to state enterprises at low prices), village bandits (local strongmen who commit crimes to defend the interests of exploiting classes) and evil village officials. [8] Maybe in the contemporary global situation, we can add an eighth devil in the NGOs who assist the others.

That the capitalist mode of production has transformed human social relations is universally known, but nowhere has this been more pronounced since the days of its birth than in its impact on social relations in the land. The separation town and city, and the transfer of people from the land to form an urban proletariat is a well known story. In the twenty-first century these crises are continuing in the developing world and are linked to capitalism's global expansion. The commodification of land is a social threat that extends to our ecology and therefore we have no option but to organise and protest. [9]

### **Biography:**

*Frans Ari Prasetyo is an independent researcher, living in Bandung, Indonesia. He works on urban*

*politics with various grassroots communities, underground collectives and the urban marginalized.*

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## **P.S.**

Rs21

<https://www.rs21.org.uk/2019/04/19/revolutionary-reflections-popular-struggle-in-indonesia-the-spirit-of-bandung/>

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## **Footnotes**

[1] <https://www.globalpolicyjournal.com/global-leadership-initiative/global-land-forum>

[2] The [opening address](#) was given by the Indonesian President Sukarno on 18 April 1955, calling on the representatives of the 29 African and Asian countries in attendance to unite in the fight against colonialism.

[3] The peasants' rights revolution in Indonesia emerged in 1950s-1960s. Indonesian peasant struggles for agrarian reform reached a peak when the parliament ratified the Basic Agrarian Law Act (Undang-Undang Pokok Agraria/ UUPA) No. 5/1960 on 24 September 1960. The Act acknowledged land reform in the country. 24 September has since been marked as Indonesia's National Peasant Day.

[4] Presidential Regulation [Number 86/2018](#) on Agrarian Reform, was signed by President Jokowi on 24 September 2018.

[5] Also see the report:

<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/226091468417040569/Indonesia-National-Slum-Upgrading-Project>

[6] Gustaaf Reerink, *Tenure Security for Indonesia's Urban Poor : a socio-legal study on land, decentralisation, and the rule of law in Bandung*, PhD Thesis (Leiden University, 2011). Open [access](#).

[7] ARAP Worksheet, 'Why the Global land Forum (GLF) in Bandung must be rejected?'. Released in Bandung, September 2018.

[8] D. N. Aidit, *Kaum tani menggantang setan-setan desa: laporan singkat tentang hasil riset mengenai keadaan kaum tani dan gerakan tani Djawa Barat* (Jakarta: Yayasan Pembaruan, 1964); Ben White, 'Remembering the Indonesian Peasants' Front and Plantation Workers' Union



(1945–1966)', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 43:1 (2016), 1-16.}

[9] Fred Magdoff, 'Twenty-first-century land grabs: accumulation by agricultural dispossession', [Monthly Review](#) (1 November 2013).