

Indonesia: Environmental damage, land theft, violence and criminalisation worsened in 2022: YLBHI

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Jakarta - The Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation (YLBHI) says that there was an increase in environmental damage and the theft of community land in a number of parts of Indonesia throughout 2022.

YLBHI Chairperson Muhammad Isnur added that the YLBHI had directly assisted in some 10 cases related to residents being evicted from their land. These cases included the Pakel Village in Banyuwangi regency, Wadas Village in Purworejo regency, Enrekang regency in South Sulawesi, Mukomuko regency, Bengkulu province and the Sangihe Islands in North Sulawesi. "The YLBHI recorded that in 2022 the theft of community land and environmental damage has worsened, increased and reached a level that is dangerous for all Indonesian people", said Isnur during a virtual event initiated by the Civil Society Coalition for the Protection of Civic Space on Thursday December 22. Isnur said that this situation has been worsened by the issuance of Law Number 11/2020 on Job Creation. With this law, Isnur believes that the government has in fact opened access for mining activities on a massive scale and in the process pushed communities aside. In addition to this, forms of repression and criminalisation continue to show a significant trend. For example, throughout 2019 data from the Institute for Public Research and Advocacy (ELSAM) found that as many as 128 individuals and 50 groups defending human rights and the environment were victims of violence. Then, between January and April 2020, 69 individuals and four traditional community groups were victims of violence. "Where residents are threatened and even forcibly evicted and are faced with violence by security forces, brutality on the scale of an invasion against communities", he said. Furthermore, the YLBHI according to Isnur also highlighted a number of other "poor" situations in 2022. He touched on freedom of expression which has never been "bright" and several situations where people have been intimidated. Isnur then touched on the Greenpeace Indonesia "Chasing the Shadow" bicycle team that was campaigning on the climate crisis and was intimidated during their tour from Jakarta to their final destination, the G20 Conference in Bali. The intimidation occurred over the period November 1-7. Isnur believes that intimidation such as this is a concrete manifestation of the retreat of democracy in Indonesia. He also views the practice as a manifestation of the return of the authoritarian regime of Suharto's New Order regime in Indonesia. "So what's called criticism and citizen's voices are considered [by the government] as a threat", he said. Isnur also highlighted the government's negligence in providing protection to its citizens. For example in the cases of atypical progressive acute kidney injury (GGAPA) in children that gave the impression that it was not being given serious attention, despite the fact that 200 children died of alleged poisoning by toxic compound in syrup medicines. "What there was was a return of government denial and frequently passing the buck", explained Isnur. In addition to this, the YLBHI also expressed concern over growing government corruption, a police force that must be totally reformed and the birth of policies that legitimise economic losses being incurred by citizens. "And of course in 2023 the challenges will be even heavier, although this should not make us give up hope or lose confidence in Indonesia's commitment to protect all Indonesian people, realise social and

humanitarian justice, this is the promise that we must pursue and strive for together”, he concluded. (khr/DAL) [Translated by James Balowski. The original title of the article was “YLBHI: Perusakan Lingkungan & Perampasan Lahan 2022 Semakin Mengerikan”.]

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