

Indonesia: Jokowi's 'land hungry' projects have triggered 73 agrarian conflicts since 2020: KPA

Thursday 19 October 2023, by [CARINA Jessi](#), [MANTALEAN Vitorio](#) (Date first published: 24 September 2023).

The Agrarian Reform Consortium (KPA) has recorded at least 73 agrarian conflicts that have broken out in different parts of the country since 2020 as a result of national strategic projects (PSN).

The KPA believes that the development model and PSN policy is “land hungry”, moreover it is being supported by the Omnibus Law on Job Creation, which is seen as leading to industrial liberalisation.

KPA Secretary General Dewi Kartika highlighted how the government continues to form new agencies in order to support these national strategic projects.

“These new institutions are becoming a state within the state that are given extremely wide authority and powers to control and regulate land on a massive scale”, said Kartika during a virtual discussion organised by the KPA to mark Farmers Day 2023.

She cited several of these agencies, such as the Land Bank, the new Capital City Authority, the Lake Toba Executive Body, the Labuan Bajo Authority and similar institutions that are given various powers including control, utilisation and management of land and capital, through to authority over business development and ease of transactions.

“The authority and state assets that are given to these kinds of new agencies are like creating mini states and kingdoms within the state, where the abuse of power and agrarian corruption can flourish and is structured”, explained Kartika.

The latest case of a large scale agrarian conflict that has attracted public attention is on Rempang Island, Batam, resulting from an order to clear local residents off their land in a repressive manner to make way for the Rempang Eco City national strategic project.

In this case, the Batam Free Trade Zone Authority (BP Batam) was given special authority in the form of regulations and supporting infrastructure, which was then reinforced by a memorandum of understanding on the use of land by the Xinyi Group in order to accelerate the project.

“We can see, that the Labuan Bajo Authority was also given the authority to acquire local [people's] land for the construction of the imagined New Bali on Komodo Island”, said Kartika.

All of these policies are applied on the basis of “domain verklaring” — the principle that if a person cannot prove the ownership of their land then it belongs to the state and they are not entitled to occupy it.

This principle is problematic because it ignores communal land rights over land that has been

cleared, cultivated and occupied by generation after generation.

Kartika gave another example of a traditional community in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) who were forced to surrender their customary land in order to make way for the Lambo Dam strategic national project.

“This is the practice of domain verklaring over our land, over land and local people’s settlements that ends in eviction and forced land pegging by the government”, she said.

Aside from the examples above, the KPA also cited many other strategic national projects that have given rise to agrarian conflicts around the country since 2020, ranging from infrastructure projects, property development, agribusiness, coastal development and mining.

These include, among others, the Mandalika MotoGP project in Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara (NTB), the Gresik Special Economic Zone in East Java, the Bener Dam project in Wades, East Java, the MNC multiland project in Sukabumi, West Java, the food estate project in North Sumatra and the new irrigated rice field project in the forests of Kalimantan.

Never mind the construction of various kinds of infrastructure to support the new capital city Nusantara in East Kalimantan, the Air Bangis oil refinery in West Sumatra, the hydroelectric power plant (PLTA) in Pinrang, South Sulawesi, the North Kayong Airport in West Kalimantan, the Karalloe Dam in Gowa, the Serang-Panimbang, Balikpapan and Samarinda toll roads, the construction of the Muna coal-fired power plant (PLTU) in South-East Sulawesi and the Royal Boskalis sand mining project in South Sulawesi.

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