

Indonesia: Over 250,000 sign petition supporting indigenous Papuans' environmental claims

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Jakarta — Indigenous peoples from the Awyu tribe in South Papua and the Moi Sigin tribe from Southwest Papua along with environmental activists handed over a petition of support for the Awyu and Moi tribes containing 253,823 signatures to the Supreme Court (MA) on Monday June 22.

They also asked about developments in a case submitted with the Supreme Court by environmental activists from the Awyu and Moi Sigin tribes.

Awyu tribal advocate and forest campaigner for Greenpeace Indonesia, Sekar Banjaran Aji said the petition, which contains more than two hundred thousand signatures, was received by five representatives from the Supreme Court, four of which serve in the court's public relations bureau (Biro Humas).

With this petition, Aji said that they wanted to remind the chief justice that this is an important case.

"During a chat earlier, after we handed over the petition, we also conveyed how important rescuing the forests for the Awyu and Moi tribes is and the importance of the MA siding with justice for indigenous peoples", said Aji at the Supreme Court in Jakarta on Monday.

Contacted separately, Supreme Court public relations bureau head Sobandi said that they had received the petition. "Yes, that's correct, it was received by the MA Humas", Sobandi told CNN Indonesia.

Aji explained that based on the number of cases that have been submitted with the Supreme Court, only one has been accepted and assigned a case number. He added that he does not know what progress there has been with the other cases.

On the same occasion, Aji also touched on the case of the minimum age requirements for regional head candidates, which was considered to have been handled very quickly by the Supreme Court.

"From the update, from the MA, we actually know how difficult it is to access justice for indigenous peoples. Friends certainly know that there have been many cases just recently, for example the ruling on the regional head issue [that allow President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo's son to be eligible as a candidate] was so fast, less than a week. But when it was the turn of the Indigenous peoples' case it's been months and months, it was almost more than three months before it got a number. An that's even before waiting for a ruling", said Aji.

Therefore, they are questioning the reasons behind the slow process in handling cases at the Supreme Court. He claimed to be given an explanation that proceedings in the Supreme Court do

indeed require time.

“So, they said that it’s a long process because the MA’s administrative process is complicated. So, the process of sending the case dossier for example done via post which requires a long time, queuing in the MA’s administrative process. Because before being assigned a case number it must be checked. Now, it’s this process that takes time according to them”, said Aji.

Aji explained that he regretted this. According to Aji, the time difference between handling this case and other cases is unfair.

“And in this context when indigenous peoples don’t get justice or recognition, we are actually opening the door to hell for ourselves. Because today, indigenous people’s forests are last place for us to be able to fortify ourselves to face the climate crisis”, said Aji.

The petition handover was also enlivened by Papuan indigenous people who wore traditional clothing.

A number of social figures and groups were also present at the handover of the petition. This included, among others, Melanie Subono, Farwiza Farhan, Kiki Nasution and Reveran Ronald Rischard Tapilatu, the University Indonesia Faculty of Law Student Executive Board (BEM), Extinction Rebellion, the Papuan Student Association (IMAPA) and the Forestry Conservation Community Foundation (YMKL).

They could be seen wearing traditional clothing from various regions and carried banners and posters with messages such as “All Eyes on Papua” and “Save Customary Forests and the Papuan People”.

In a written statement, environmental activist Hendrikus Woro from the Awyu tribe said that the lawsuit concerns the environmental feasibility permit issued by the Papua Provincial Government for the company PT Indo Asiana Lestari (IAL). The permit covers an area of 36,094 hectares and is in the traditional forest of the Woro clan — part of the Awyu tribe.

In addition to the Supreme Court appeal on the PT IAL case, a number of Awyu tribe members have submitted an appeal against a lawsuit by PT Kartika Cipta Pratama (KCP) and PT Megakarya Jaya Raya (MJR), two palm companies that have and are also expanding into Boven Digoel regency in South Papua, based on a decision by the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (KLHK). The Supreme Court’s ruling will determine the fate of 65,415 hectares of rain forests in the PT KCP and PT MJR concessions.

Then, the Moi Sigin sub-tribe is fighting against PT Sorong Agro Sawitindo (SAS) which will cut down 18,160 hectares of customary forests for an oil palm plantation. PT SAS sued the central government after it revoked a forest release permit and their business license. The Moi Sigin community is fighting back by becoming an intervention defendant in the case. (pop/kid)

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