

# A reflection on a peripheral movement

## The “Save Aru” social movement 2013-2015 from a historical perspective

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### ABSTRACT

This article examines the struggle of the Aru Islands community to preserve their forests and their natural environment in the shape of the “Save Aru” social movement from 2013 to 2015. Today this social movement is still alive and kicking. In 2010, the Aru Islands community was taken by surprise by the plan of a private corporation (PT Menara Group or PT MG) to annex forest areas in the Aru Islands in order to convert them into sugar-cane plantations. Their outrage at this plan spurred the citizens of Aru to fight the might of this corporate and preserve their forests and environment. Not all has gone smoothly as the civil society movement in Aru has been divided into pro-splitting and counter-splitting on a regional division agenda. Meanwhile, this exploitative business has become a scourge for the Aru people who want to preserve their forests and the environment as a whole. Thanks to the campaign, environmental awareness appears to be growing rather than abating among the Aru Islands community. Young people in the Aru have been sharing their stories about the natural resources around them under threat from the power of private corporate capital with friends, family, and neighbours. The danger of deforestation by private corporations is a problem and a challenge that must be faced by all communities, whether they be Aru, Indonesian, or international, who care about the preservation of the forests in the Aru Islands as a “lung” of the world, helping to reduce the effects of global warming and the ozone depletion.

### KEYWORD

Aru Islands; *adat* (customary); Menara Group; sugar-cane plantation; Save Aru; forest; environment.

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INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

The Aru Islands are a peripheral yet integral part of Maluku, a spice-producing region that has been known to the outside world since the European colonial era in the Southeast Asia region (Lapian 2011; Wakim 2014; Wempi 2012). In the seventeenth century, Maluku became a battleground for Europeans eager to control the trade in sought-after spices (Topatimasang 2016; Widjojo in Marsaoly 2015; Leirizza 2001). It was from their seats in Ternate and Tidore that the sultans, nobles, and *ulama* propagated Islam in Aru Islands in the periphery of Maluku, including the part now known as Southeast Maluku. This propagation occurred even though the Aru Islands lie far from the sultanates of Ternate and Tidore, once known as the centre of Maluku, the fabled Spice Islands. As Andaya says, from the point of view of Ternate and Tidore, Aru lies well and truly in the periphery of Maluku (Andaya 2015: 95).

Once the islands that make up the province of Maluku were a legendary source of world spices. From the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, Indian, Arab, and Chinese traders were regular visitors of Halmahera, Ternate, Tidore, Aru, and Banda, known as the principal sources of some of the pre-refrigeration world's most coveted spices (Corn 1999). In the twentieth century, after Indonesian independence, in an era in which the demand for spices had declined, the government realized the potential for fisheries in the huge Aru area; yielding approximately two million tons of fish from the Arafura Sea per year. Although this figure is of global significance, surprisingly there are still many fishermen in the Aru Islands who have to live in virtual poverty. The lot of the farmers in the hinterland of the Aru Islands is also endangered economically. One reason for their economic backwardness is the lack of infrastructure and other facilities that would help them to market their products more efficiently. After years of neglect, now suddenly at the dawn of the twenty-first century, the Aru Islands have been taken by surprise by the plan to establish sugar-cane plantations there.

The forests of Aru are an integral part of Indonesia's tropical forests that have become one of the last homes and refuges of some of the world's dwindling unique biological wealth. The biodiversity contained in Indonesian forests includes 12% of the world's mammal species, 7.3% of all reptile and amphibian species, and 17% of bird species.<sup>2</sup> It is believed there are many more species that have not been identified and are still waiting to be discovered. A clear example taken from WWF data shows that between 1994 and 2007 more than 400 species new to the world of science had been identified in the forests of Borneo. Unquestionably Indonesia as one of the countries with the highest biodiversity in the world. On the basis of 2010 FAO data, the world's forests –

<sup>1</sup> Our sincere thanks to Triana Winni and Agustinus Teluwun (Kepulauan Aru) who have participated as our teamwork during our research days in Aru Islands, so this paper could be completed. We also thank to Qusthan Abqary Hisan Firdaus for his critics and comments for this paper.

<sup>2</sup> WWF (World Wildlife Fund for Nature) Report, "About Forest Species", retrieved from [https://www.wwf.or.id/en/about\\_wwf/whatwedo/forest\\_species/about\\_forest\\_species/forest/](https://www.wwf.or.id/en/about_wwf/whatwedo/forest_species/about_forest_species/forest/); accessed on 9-11-2018.

including those in Indonesia save 289 gigatons of carbon in total and play an important role in maintaining global climate stability.<sup>3</sup>

In this connection, forest degradation continues and has become a major problem in Indonesia. Ministry of Forestry data shows, at least 1.1 million hectares or 2% of Indonesia's forests are cleared and disappear every year. Of the total 130 million hectares of remaining forest, 42 million has been cut down.<sup>4</sup>

If the Aru forest is cleared and converted into sugar-cane plantations, this will only add to damage to forests in the country which is already extremely alarming. Therefore, the resistance of the Aru community to the construction of a sugar factory needs the support not only of the entire community of the islands but also of all parties everywhere with an interest in environmental sustainability. This paper attempts to reveal how civil society in Aru has been struggling to preserve sustainability in the region since a private company with plans to set up a sugar factory on Aru Islands land had been secretly lobbying local government officials. If the plan were to go ahead, it would have an untold social, ecological, and cultural impact on the region.

Colonial stories ranging from the sixteenth to the twentieth century tell of the extraordinary trials and tribulations of the people of the area under Portuguese, Dutch, Spanish, and British occupations. Even at beginning of the twenty-first century, three-quarters of a century after independence, the people of the Aru Islands are still facing the threat of "oppression and internal colonialism" posed by an alliance between their rulers in Jakarta and national capitalists/business circles eager to clear the forests and plant sugar-cane without giving environmental preservation. This is happening even though it has been acknowledged that the environment is really vital to guarding the Aru Islands from the negative impacts of climate change that could threaten their existence.

The alliance of rulers and national capitalists/business circle has been toying with a plan to build a sugar factory in the Aru area since 2010. The threat this poses is a real danger to the region's environment, since the plan is that two-thirds of Aru's forests will be cleared, a massive deforestation to allow the land to be used for sugar production. People who care about the environment are resisting by opposing this plan and are carrying out a "Save Aru" campaign at home and abroad.

As said, even at the beginning of the present century, the people of the Aru Islands, Southeast Maluku, are being threatened by the expansionist plans of national capitalists' intent on targeting the fertile tropical forests in their islands. This threat crystallized in 2013-2015 when a Jakarta-based corporation put in an unvarnished claim to force the introduction of sugar-cane plantations

<sup>3</sup> See footnote 2.

<sup>4</sup> FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization) in 2010 estimates that the world's forests store 289 gigatons (Gt) of carbon in their biomass alone, and at least 17.4% of global greenhouse gas emission resulted from deforestation and forest degradation. Forests offer the quickest, most cost-effective and largest means of curbing global emissions. It would save the world approximately \$3.7 trillion between 2010 and 2200 if we halve greenhouse gas emissions in total and play an important role in maintaining global climate stability (Stern 2006).

in Aru. This proved to be the trigger for the setting-up of social movements in the Aru Islands. Their slogan "Save Aru" has since resounded throughout the Moluccas, all over the country and even internationally.

#### NOTES ON METHODOLOGY

This paper is our reflection on a field study of the social movement "Save Aru" 2013-2015 and its implications. So far, its proponents have been successful in preventing the access of corporations that want to cut down the forests in Aru Islands, clearing them completely to make way for a take-over by agrarian businesses. This article is complemented with interviews with traditional actors and leaders. The method used in this paper is interdisciplinary, utilizing methods from sociology, anthropology, and history that all serve to produce data with which to trace the growth of the "Save Aru" movement and this has been reinforced by the search for literature studies, both in textbooks and the results of previous studies related with the history of the Aru Islands and the socio-cultural aspects of the community.

It is still debatable how far the prevailing social movement theories can account for the complexities of socio-religious movements in contemporary Muslim societies, in particular when these perspectives are rooted in the highly differentiated and politically open Western societies, presenting a highly structured and over-homogenizing picture of social movements (Bayat 2005). In particular, to what extent can they help us understand the process of solidarity building in these politically closed and technologically limited settings? In the view of both collective behaviour and resource mobilization paradigms, collective identity in the sense of commonality and solidarity predates collective action. Social structure, in a sense, selects people with a common identity, bringing them together to act collectively. The collective behaviour approach lays a strong emphasis on "generalized belief" and "shared values" as the central axis around which mobilization takes place (Bayat 2005).

In a structuralist paradigm, resource mobilization theory, in line with other rationalist models, emphasizes actors' rational motives for being part of a collective. Yet, like collective behaviour, it also presupposes the existence of somewhat "metaphysical" commonality among social movement actors, with the difference that it bases this commonality on the actors' understanding of their shared interests. Authors working with this model place particular emphasis on collectivities based upon complex and structured organizations in which movement leaders play a decisive role. Disarray or differences might appear, but these often result from external factors, for instance, "repressive conditions". Otherwise, cohesion, concerted ideas, and actions are what in a sense define a movement.

Methodologically this requires taking a step to go beyond mere discourse, language, and symbols, especially those of the leadership, accepting both multiple discourses and meanings as tools for writing histories of such activities. Although such "culturalists" as Jasper (1997), Johnston and Klandemans (1995), and notably Alberto Melucci (1996), perceive social

movements productively from the results of processes of negotiation and communicative actions, nonetheless their models, like those of others, are rooted in and orientated towards the highly differentiated, technologically advanced, and politically open societies.

#### THE EMERGENCE OF "SAVE ARU"

In 2010 the Aru Islands community was shocked by the bad news that 484,493 ha of the 626,900 ha of the Aru Islands land area or about 77% of the Aru land area, was actually owned by 28 subsidiaries under the umbrella of the PT Menara Group (PT MG) consortium that promotes the establishment of sugar-cane plantations. This news should come as a surprise to anyone who finds it difficult to imagine that 77% of the living space of the Aru indigenous community was included in the concession area of the PT MG, leaving no more than a quarter of the land for the use of the community in its struggle to make a livelihood. Initially, it was not known that PT MG had operated any plantations before it set its sights on the Aru Islands, and that PT MG was boldly going ahead applying for plantation permits that far exceeded the number of plantations it had established elsewhere in the past few years.<sup>5</sup>

The social impact of the existence of this concession, including vertical and horizontal conflicts and the erosion of social relations systems, were blindingly obvious to anyone who wanted to see. In a nutshell, the cultural system of the Aru indigenous people would be teetering on to the verge of extinction because various sites believed sacred by the Aru indigenous people as well as an integral part of their history were under the threat of destruction. If the plan were to be implemented, ecosystems would unquestionably be doomed to ruination because the wealth of flora and fauna would be replaced by sugar-cane and its concomitant pests. The fresh water supply on small islands devoid of mountains would be absorbed by the roots of the sugar-cane. It is a botanical fact that sugar-cane is a grass whose roots do store water reserves and therefore have to suck up large amounts of moisture. Hence the people of Aru will be forced to do battle with the sugar-cane for water.

Even worse, the regional sanitation system in the area of sugar-cane plantations would be thrown into turmoil for indigenous people because the water would be used for the irrigation system for the sugar-cane rather than for their daily needs. The undermining of the sanitation system and its concomitant concept of hygiene would also put the preservation of forests and the indigenous peoples of the Aru Islands at risk (Syam, Winni, and Teluwun 2015).

It goes without saying that, were this to happen, the impact of environmental damage will be bad; the indigenous people will be more susceptible to skin diseases such as fungal infections and leprosy.

<sup>5</sup> #savearu mengusir Menara Group, saatnya untuk #savebovendigoel. [[Http://pusaka.or.id/savearu-mengusir-menara-group-saatnya-untuk-savebovendigoel/](http://pusaka.or.id/savearu-mengusir-menara-group-saatnya-untuk-savebovendigoel/); accessed on 18-10-2018.]

## THE ARAFURA AND ARU SEA MARINE AREAS

Geopolitically, the territorial waters of the Arafura and Aru Seas, that border on three countries as well as their role as an international shipping route, raise the problem of the strategic position of this region, heightening the threat to the sovereignty of the state. Misuse of the benefits offered by Alur Laut Kepulauan Indonesia (ALKI, the Indonesian Archipelago Sea Channel), turning it into a route for illegal activities such as smuggling, IUU (Illegal, Unreported, Unregulated) Fishing, waste disposal, transshipment, and others is another danger that is impossible to ignore. Since its inception ALKI has greatly increased the strategic importance of this area to Indonesia.

Administratively, the regional government concerned with the waters of the Arafura and Aru Seas consists of two Papuan and one Maluku Province,<sup>6</sup> and nine districts/city governments, including Merauke Regency, Mimika Regency, Asmat Regency, Mappi Regency, Southwest Maluku Regency, West Southeast Maluku Regency, Southeast Maluku Regency, Aru Islands Regency, and Tual City. The regional government that is responsible for keeping an eye on the situation in the region is in the vanguard of the management of maritime space in the Arafura and Aru Sea area. Short distances and an understanding of the geographical, social, and local cultural conditions are key factors in facilitating the management of maritime space in the Arafura and Aru Seas, but so far this potential could have been better managed. The widespread practice of IUU Fishing in the region has been to the detriment of Indonesia, exposing the poor supervision and management of natural resources in these waters (Nugroho et al. 2016).

One key document in this respect is Decree of the Minister of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Number KEP.01/MEN/2009 re: The Republic of Indonesia Fisheries Management Region (WPP-RI). The Arafura Sea is included in WPP-RI 718. This sea is one of the most productive shrimp and fish catchment areas in Indonesia. The high productivity of the Arafura Sea is attributable to the fact that this habitat of shrimp and demersal fish (*ikan demersal*, Aru fish species) is constantly subject to nutrient enrichment because of upwellings and nutrient input from river flows. The estimation of the potential of fish resources in the region is no less than 13% of national marine fish resources. The land-based and centralized development orientation in Java inhibits the optimal management of maritime space in the Arafura and Aru Seas (Kementerian Kelautan dan Perikanan Republik Indonesia 2014).

The abundant resources and the position of the Arafura Sea, that has borders with Australia and Papua New Guinea and is an international shipping route, can be a real potential resource or a threat to Indonesia. If the management of the maritime space in the Arafura and Aru Sea is conducted properly and impeccably, this potential can be achieved. However, if these conditions are not met, the Arafura Sea will dwindle into a site for illegal fishing. The upshot will be the threat to state sovereignty and security will

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.malukuprov.go.id/index.php/2016-10-06-01-23-21/2016-10-12-00-37-52>; accessed on 28-9-2019.

be heightened by the activities of international ships that can move around without attracting much attention.

The Arafura and Aru Sea Marine Areas are an important maritime resource in Eastern Indonesia, strategically situated between Australia and Papua New Guinea at the gateway to the Pacific Ocean. This region is very rich in potential fish resources. Besides the economic and strategic benefits it offers, the geographical location and role of the Arafura Sea as an international shipping lane as stipulated in the provisions of ALKI underline its importance to Indonesia's security, both nutritional and political (Nugroho et al. 2016).

It was in this vital maritime area that between 2013 and 2015, a resistance campaign entitled "Save Aru" emerged and took root in the Aru Islands. This campaign run on social media opposes the deforestation planned to make way for establishment of sugar-cane plantations in the Aru Islands. It has gone viral on social media, not only in Indonesia but also internationally. This resistance campaign was born because a private corporation wanted to clear the forest in the islands and convert the land into sugar-cane plantations.

The results of a study by Forest Watch Indonesia (FWI) show that there are 2.97 million of 7.40 million hectares of land still natural forest on small islands (islands with an area of up to 2,000 km), including the Aru Islands, throughout Indonesia. Of that total, 1.3 million hectares or 18% are burdened with the threat of land-based investment permits, such as Forest Management Rights (HPH), Industrial Plantation Forests (HTI), oil-palm plantations, and mining.

The threat to natural forests on small islands became more urgent after the Ministry of Forestry - at that time - issued a directive policy on location for HPH, HTI and ecosystem restoration Decree No. 5984/Menhut-II/BPRUK/2014. This policy allocates land covering an area of 0.85 million hectares spread across 242 small islands in Indonesia for company concessions. The Aru Archipelago was one of the areas targeted for sugar-cane plantations in the period of 2013-2015. This obvious danger to this way of life unleashed the resolve of local communities to fight back by founding the "Save Aru" movement.

#### CAMPAIGN OF SAVE ARU

The problems in the Aru Islands began to attract the attention of the domestic and the international community (communities and environmental activists from Europe, Japan, Australia) before hash tag (#SaveAru) offered everyone who as yet unacquainted with each other a connection to talk about the Aru Archipelago and its people. At the outset the #Save Aru movement was coordinated by local residents in Dobo, the capital of Aru District, who were vehemently opposed the plan that would have meant the destruction of their forest. This limited campaign later attracted far more attention after it had been disseminated more widely through social and online media.

Since then this social movement has grown massively, attracting the attention of many people from different backgrounds, eager to help and support the resistance movement to save the Aru Islands forest. At the moment the social movement has temporarily succeeded in stopping the businessmen

and the government from forging ahead with their plans to denude the forested areas in Aru and turn them into sugar-cane fields. Social activists, traditional leaders, and the different communities in Aru are working together in this social movement.

The "Save Aru" movement is a new social movement. This construct is one of the most widely used frameworks in social sciences to explain how different social organizational structures are formed and make internal decision-making resorting to strategies and policies whose effectiveness is maintained and is accountable. The "Save Aru" movement is an important social movement and reveals the increasing significance of civil society organizations (CSOs) in advocating for and bringing about changes that tally with the aspirations and interests of a community itself (Melucci 1989; Martin 2015; Gamson 1975).

As stated by the theorists of the New Social Movement (NSM), theoretically social movements contain three main concepts: the structure of political opportunities; resource mobilization; and framing. The political opportunity structure consists of the availability of political space (usually measured as an open public space in a democratic government) in which the movement is free to advocate effectively. Resource mobilization is the ability of an organization to secure and utilize resources, both political and material, that will enable it to run credible advocacy campaigns. Framing is a rhetoric and narrative used by organizations to promote the causes of advocated issues. While opportunity structure and resource mobilization are the structural-based determinants of a social movement's political actions and their successes and failures, framing is agent-based and can be utilized with little regard to the existing socio-political structure (Martin 2015).

Framing is agent-based and can be utilized by taking account of the existing socio-political structure. This was the NSM that gained increasing support in the late 1980s and early 1990s, allowing the school of hegemony that was more oriented to structure, rationality and resource mobilization to be challenged. Unlike its predecessor theorists, who considered social movements coherent and unilateral, the theory of new social movements now believes that "social movements can stand and act with a plurality of groups, desires, interests, and orientations, which can lead to conflict or be in tension with each other" (Arifianto 2017). Judging from the interests, orientations, and patterns of the movement to some extent the "Save Aru" fits this definition.

The upshot is that social movements are no longer assumed to consist of a group of activists drawn together by common complaints arising from social problems and search for a common set of solutions to solve them. Now they are seen as complex organizations consisting of individual activists who can have different goals and priorities and who often disagree with each other about the best way to reach their goals and objectives. Scholars such as Gamson and Tarrow have distinguished social movements into two sub-groups on the basis of their organizational structure: centralized and decentralized organizations. Assuming a contrary stance to the theory of resource mobilization, NSM theorists argue that the actors in the new social movement do not always

have to be cohesive and coherent, with goals that can be calculated rationally (Melucci 1989; Martin 2015; Gamson 1975). Viewed from this perspective, the “Save Aru” movement been able to progress in helping the people of the region to check the steps taken by the Menara Group to clear the Aru forest in pursuit of its own agrarian aspirations.

Beginning with the artist Glen Fredly, the movement has expanded to religious leaders, artists, academics, students, local organizations, creative communities of young people, including large organizations, encouraging all to participate in one big movement, named #SaveAru. Social media has proved to be the tool by which an environmental campaign that was originally small and limited has been able to take off across space and time. It is a campaign that can knock on the door of anyone’s heart, inspiring them to fight to preserve the natural wealth of the Aru Islands. By utilizing social media and choosing the right campaign strategy, #SaveAru has been able to reach everyone, even in the geographically distant corners of the Aru Islands. Social media have also proved a very effective instrument in the organization of various real actions. They have been used to drum up public pressure and permitted Aru residents to express their direct concern about the problems they are confronting. The movement “Save Aru” has even attracted the support and sympathy of the international community concerned with the environment (Almaskaty 2018).

Enmeshed in an atmosphere of concern and anxiety, the Aru community has been enabled to make its resistance known and to fight with energy and enthusiasm. However, the “Save Aru” movement is still facing the seemingly insuperable barrier of the collusion between rulers – business people who are eager to establish sugar-cane plantations in the forest areas that indigenous peoples consider belong to them.

#### NATURAL WEALTH, RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES, AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

The Aru Islands consist of more than 180 islands, of which five major islands form the mainland, namely: Trangan, Kobror, Wokam, Maikor, and Kola. These islands are separated from each other by almost a hundred larger and smaller straits. On the basis of an analysis of the Landsat-8 Image coverage in 2013, the area of the Aru Islands is preponderantly made up of natural forest. More than 80% or 667,000 hectares are lowland and mangrove forests in very good condition. Among the types of trees found on the islands are merbau (*Itsia bijuga*), canary nut (*Canariu amboinense*), gofasa (*Vitex cofassus*), redwood (*Eugenia rumphii*), and bawang (*Dysoxylum euphlebiium*).

Marlon Ririmasse’s study has revealed that Aru’s strategic value in relation to the surrounding region and the outside world has at least two aspects. Firstly, paleo-geographically the Aru Islands form one unit on a continental shelf shared with Papua and Australia. Consequently, Aru’s environmental history is indivisible from that of its mainland to the east and south. Secondly, Aru’s unique position as a source of a highly desirable exotic commodity has made this region an ineluctable segment of regional and global markets. These two important factors have ensured that Aru has developed as an open area,

not least a consequence of contact and interaction that such commodities have engendered. This had a direct impact on the demographic diversity in the region in the past. One consequence of the first aspect is that the regional environmental changes that gradually occurred during the Late Pleistocene had major implications for the Sahul Exposure Profile that includes the Aru Islands, Papua, and Australia (Ririmasse 2013).

Although local variations have emerged over time, the natural world, classified as Australo-Papuan, is specific to this region. Small marsupial animals, kangaroos, cassowaries, and birds-of-paradise are among the iconic fauna that bear witness to this ecological interconnectedness. One of the most prominent geographical characteristics of the islands was the drastic environmental change that took place at the end of the last glacial period around 12,000 to 10,000 BC. At this time the sea levels rose and created the long, narrow straits that separate one island in the archipelago from another as well as cutting the archipelago off from both Australia and Papua. This geographical characteristic later became one of the typical environmental markers of the area. So far, the world's scientists have collected more than 9,000 specimens there, representing about 1,600 species (Wallace 1857; O'Connor, Spriggs, and Veth 2005).

In Wallace's record in his travels to the Aru Islands, in the space of one day he was able to determine thirty species of butterflies. This number exceeds the specimens he obtained along the Amazon River, the second longest river in the world. After having lived in the tropics for seven years, in Aru it was for the first time that Wallace finally found a tree fern in perfect condition. Wallace managed to collect various species of insects, birds, and beautiful land shells. These species included some very rare to European naturalists. Wallace was enchanted by the beauty of the *bengkarung* (a skink) he came across in the Aru Islands. Wallace also mentioned that the animals typical of Australia such as kangaroos were still commonly found and had become an item in the consumption of the local community at that time (Wallace 1857).

Each island has its own specialities. Birds-of-paradise, black parrots, partridges, and cassowaries can be found on Wokam, but not on the other islands in Aru. Wallace also admired the palms. These Aru Island palms have straight-growing stems and rise to a height of 100 feet with a crown of beautiful towering foliage (Wallace 2009).

In the course of history, a nascent civil society grew and developed in the Aru Islands, with very high tolerance shown between religious communities (Islam, Christianity, and local beliefs). An example of this tolerance is found in Rebi Village, Aru Selatan Utara District, Aru Islands Regency. The Christians in Rebi Village have collaborated in the construction of the mosque, and vice-versa. Christian join Muslim communities to work hand-in-hand hunting in the forest for deer, pigs, and other animals. Bags from the hunt are used to fund the construction of places of worship, both churches and mosques. Although Muslims and Christians live in distinct areas, Muslim villages and Christian villages, this separatism is not attributable to any religious conflicts

or the like, but because they respect one another. This information is drawn from a statement made by Mr Joshias Darakay who lives in a Christian village (Syam, Winni, and Teluwun 2015).

The natural wealth of the Aru Islands has been known to the outside world for centuries. The area is no stranger to the large-scale exploitation of marine and forest resources. Pearl companies and fishing/fish-processing marked the beginning of the history of exploitation of natural resources. Since the 1980s, the orientation of natural resource exploitation has been extended to include forest resources, especially timber. From there it has expanded again to include land resources, especially plantations and afforestation. Instead of deciding to develop the fisheries sector, it seems that the regional government has now set its sights on providing more space for land-based investment and the clearing of forests on the mainland.

The indigenous people (*masyarakat adat*) are temperate people. Even though there are many migrants from outside Aru and there are religious differences between them, these has not given rise to any significant problems. The people are divided up into various tribes that observe their own customs. Despite their differences they are united through the traditional unit of Aru Islands indigenous community, the *Jargaria*. *Jargaria* means 'Aru Islands'. The inhabitants live in *Jargaria* and are called *Jar Juir*. *Jar* means 'Aru', while the word *Juir* means 'people, clans'. The indigenous communities live scattered throughout the Aru Islands from *Godor Juring* (southern tip) to *Juring Toi-Toi* (northern tip). In Indonesian, that is more widely understood now, this is expressed as from the tip of Batu Goyang to the end of Waria Lau.

In other words, the *Jar Juir* are those Aru people who live within the *Jargaria*. The life of the indigenous people who still live under the auspices of the *Jargaria* is very dependent on nature. It is obvious to any observer that their activities that are inseparable from the forest. They return from the forest to the village on certain days to worship; the Muslims, on Friday and Saturday and Sunday for Christians. On other days, the villages will be deserted because the people are away in the forest gathering natural products. The forest products obtained by the Aru indigenous people, other than those needed to fulfil their daily needs, will be sold in Dobo. However, it should be noted that the Aru people sell forest products only to get the money they need to buy what cannot be produced from the forest. For example, when selling venison and deerskin (*kulit rusa*) they ask only IDR 700,000. Theirs is a precarious livelihood and BPS data from 2011 and 2018 show that 30% of the population of the Aru Islands lived below the poverty line.

[...] *Masyarakat adat Aru ini adalah orang yang hidup bergantung pada hutan. Bahkan alang-alang sekalipun. Karena alang-alang juga bagian dari ritual adat. Masyarakat adat itu punya pesta adat membakar alang-alang setiap tahunnya untuk berburu. Mereka juga melaut tapi mereka bukan pelaut ulung, merekahnya punya sampan. Mereka punya sampan bukan untuk laut tapi untuknyebrang dari hutan pulau yang satu ke hutan - pulau yang lain [...]*"

[...] These indigenous inhabitants of Aru are people who depend on the forest and also on *alang-alang* (species of perennial grass). The latter important as it is also used in traditional rituals. The indigenous people have traditional parties to burn the grass every year so that they can hunt. They also sail on the sea but they were not born sailors. They have only ever had small boats. They have boats not to go to sea but to cross from one island forest to another - another island [...]. (Interview with Jacky Manuputti, Chair of the Research Division and Development of the Sinode Protestant Church of Maluku, in Dobo, March 2013).

Jacky Manuputti is one of the most prominent and active figures in trying to save the Aru Islands. He has emerged as a key actor by urging the Sinode Church to proclaim an official stance against companies wanting sabotage the preservation of the forest and the livelihood of the indigenous peoples. He is among those who have organized blogger communities on an Ambon level, an important step towards allowing the "Save Aru" campaign to soar to the international level.

The present situation means that it is imperative to recognize the threat facing the Aru people, like the sword of Damocles poised to deprive them of their living space. Therefore, to achieve the aim of the movement and write a systematic research report, three things must be discussed. First and foremost, why does the sugar-cane plantation concession loom so large in the Aru Islands, menacing the way of life there? Secondly, what shape is the struggle of the Aru Islands Indigenous People's movement taking to defend their rights? Thirdly how secure is the position of the customary law community after National Inquiry?

Unquestionably over the centuries the indigenous people have developed their own traditions to protect their forests and living space. This tradition gradually took root as their community grew. Although many cultural influences have infiltrated from the outside world, new spiritual beliefs such as Christianity and Islam have not necessarily obliterated the original spiritual world and its concomitant knowledge of the Aru indigenous people.

This is definitely maintained and continues to be passed on from generation to generation. It encompasses a knowledge of plants and animals that are believed to be strongly related to human origins, geography, protection and places of refuge, patterns of behaviour, and social and individual constructs that are closely linked to efforts to maintain the balance of life between humans and nature. One of the offshoots of this knowledge is the system known as *sasi*.

*Sasi* is a customary mechanism (in the form of a prohibition) used to regulate human relations with nature and ensure that the natural world is not overexploited. In the Aru Islands there are two *sasi adat*, namely: *Sasi Adat Loi-Loi* and *Sasi Adat Sir*. *Sasi Adat Loi-Loi* is ordained to be used in the forest, while *Sasi Adat Sir* is observed the sea. These types of *sasi adat* are subdivided into five smaller groups, namely: *Sasi Adat Nagwe* using eagles, *sasi adat* using coconut leaves, *sasi adat* using poisonous snakes, *sasi adat* using salt-water or riverine crocodiles, and *sasi adat* using traditional leaf receptacles or modern plain white plates used to prepare *sirih*. Indigenous peoples fully believe that

whoever violates the *sasi* will be struck by disaster, that even can prove fatal.

Recognizing the negative impacts that could potentially be generated by the presence of PT Menara Group (PT MG), the indigenous peoples have reacted and resisted by imposing a *sasi* on 80% of the Aru region, including those areas designated as PT MG concessions.<sup>7</sup> One example is the installation of the *sasi* known as *Siarukin* inaugurated by the Aru Islands indigenous people on 22 November 2013 in Nata Popjetur, South Aru district. Initially, the indigenous people of one village gathered in a traditional house to deliberate on the matter, after which they agreed to impose the *sasi*. Once agreed upon, the installation of the *sasi* was carried out by each clan in their respective marginal regions. Under the watchful eye of clan representatives, the customary leader of each clan took the lead in the installation of the *sasi* at agreed locations.

The chief of the customary clan of *Siarukin* recited the mantras beseeching the ancestors to guard the *adat* area, including any part under threat from any raid that might be organized by PT MG. Convincingly, after the installation of *sasi* by the community, those who had agreed to the presence of PT MG were afflicted by various catastrophic events.

The community believes that their catastrophes were retribution for violating the *sasi*. Among these misfortunes were:

1. The death of the Aru Islands Regent, Teddy Tengko, who had granted PT MG eleven Indigenous Forest Area Release Permits to operate in the Aru Islands. Initially, the Supreme Court Team had forcibly arrested Teddy Tengko at Dobar Rar Gwamar Aru Airport. After his arrest, while in remand, in the Sukamiskin area, Bandung, Teddy Tengko began to fall ill and eventually died. After investigation, it turned out that the eleven licences the late Teddy Tengko had granted to open up the Indigenous Forest Zone was an area that had been covered by the *sasi adat* by the owners of Customary Land/Landowners and Indigenous Forest Areas.
2. A member of the Aru Islands Police Resort trespassed on the *sasi* that had been installed in the Yos Sudarso Dobo Field, Aru Islands. A few weeks later, the policeman was struck by a fatal illness. The commander who was on duty at the time of the violation of the *sasi adat* also became sick and died in Ambon City, Maluku.
3. The Deputy Regent who served during the Teddy Tengko administration, who was also involved in granting PT MG permission to come to the Aru Islands, was another struck down by a fatal illness. There was yet another traditional (*adat*) figure and village head who later also suffered a fatal illness after signing a permit to release customary land to the MG company.

<sup>7</sup> Report Forest Watch Institute-FWI, 2014.

At first glance, these events might seem supernatural and irrational. However, in the minds of the Aru Islands indigenous people, what happened has shored up their belief that *sasi* works and still remains a powerful traditional mechanism to preserve nature in the Aru Islands, as Simon Kamsy states,

[...] *su banyak sekali yang meninggal, mulai dari bupati, wakil bupati, anggota DPR, kepala desa. Itu semua meninggal karena menjual tanah adat yang sudah di-sasi oleh masyarakat adat [...]*

'[...] so many people have died, beginning with the regent, followed by the deputy-regent, members of the DPR, a village head. All of them died because they had sold [had handed over] customary land that has been declared a *sasi* area by the indigenous peoples [...]'.

(Interview with Simon Kamsy, Aru Islands indigenous people, in Dobo, March 2013).

#### SOCIAL RESISTANCE AND THE DEFENCE OF JARGARIA

The resistance of the indigenous people who dared to reject the presence of a giant corporation that was prepared to tear apart the natural resources of their islands did not stop with their installation of the *sasi adat*. Besides their recourse to the methods used in a typical *adat* struggle by imposing a *sasi*, the indigenous people also carried on their struggle to rid themselves and their islands of the presence of PT MG by consolidated actions composed of a number of different elements. In its initial stages, the struggle began with the gathering of the young people and the women in Dobo. They planned and organized actions to ditch plans by a company intent on destroying the natural forests to build factories and set up sugar-cane plantations.

To facilitate the organization of community and youth actions, the Aru Islands Community Communication Forum was formed in 2012. In mid-2013, Aru activists with the support of the people formed the Aru Indigenous Coalition of Youth and Community to strengthen their struggle against the presence of PT MG Consortium. The most popular of these concerted actions was the emergence of the broad solidarity group supporting the Aru Islands indigenous people in their struggle that called itself "Save Aru".

"Save Aru" is becoming increasingly popular, especially on social media, because its success has encouraged the participation of a community of local Ambonese bloggers who play an active role in campaigning to defend the rights of the Aru Islands indigenous people in their struggle against PT MG. A local Ambonese blogger community, largely made up of local young people, has mobilized their networks to draw attention to this campaign. They have contacted friends and relatives in the city, out of town, even those who happened to be studying abroad. They have explained what has been happening in the Aru Islands and the urgent need to safeguard the indigenous forests. The perseverance of these young people has meant that "Save Aru" has been successful in raising awareness among various circles, including

the urban middle class, artists, intellectuals, and people farther afield outside Indonesia, giving the campaign an international dimension.

*Save Aru ini kan luas sampai ke tingkat internasional, misalnya teman-teman dari kampus-kampus internasional yang ikut terlibat dalam memberikan dukungan melalui foto-foto solidaritas yang di-upload di twitter.*

“Save Aru” has spread widely right up to the international level, for example, friends from international campuses have become involved and have offered support by uploading solidarity photos on Twitter’.  
(Interview with Jacky Manuputti, in Dobo, October 2014).

As it has expanded the resistance of the Aru people has been layered, beginning with their traditional form of defence by imposing the *sasi* and running street convoy actions, “Save Aru” has gained solidarity through the support it has won on social media, through the online petitions initiated by Glen Fredly, to resistance in the form of actions that have gained publicity on an international level. In 2014, the Aru Islands indigenous people felt strong enough in their cause to make allegations of human rights violations arising from the presence of PT MG in the Aru Islands to the National Commission on Human Rights of the Republic of Indonesia (KOMNAS HAM RI).

On 29-31 October 2014, KOMNAS HAM RI worked with several partners among Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Indonesia in holding a National Inquiry – a systematic investigation into human rights issues in which the general public was invited to participate by giving testimony about alleged wrongs in Dobo. Another was held in Ambon and it also discussed related clashes that had occurred between the customary law community and PT MG in the Aru Islands.

Mamah Do, one of the women among the traditional warriors of the Aru Islands indigenous community, was convinced of the positive influence of inquiry. Before the National Inquiry was convened, Mamah Do claimed she had been terrorized and intimidated by the Indonesian National Army (TNI) and by the police sent by the Regional Government (Pemda) to suppress dissident voices and silence the strongly worded opinions raised in defence of the traditional rights of the Aru Islands indigenous people.

After the setting up of the National Inquiry, terrorization and intimidation by the state apparatus decreased, encouraging Mamah Do and other Aru Islands indigenous people to become more courageous in voicing or expressing opinions in defence of their rights. In other words, since the National Inquiry was set up, the Regional Government has become more careful in applying strong-arm tactics or in taking repressive actions because it is aware that it is being monitored by KOMNAS HAM RI. Below is the narrative of Mamah Do (Dolfince Gaelagoe):

*Dulu sebelum Inkuiri Nasional, setelah Mamah bersuara saat sosialisasi PT MG yang berkedok Sosialisasi Undang-Undang Desa itu, besoknya ada TNI yang datang ke rumah. Mamah bilang, “Oh iya bagaimana? Silakan masuk, silakan masuk”. TNI itu ternyata*

*meminta Mamah untuk bertemu dengan komandannya atau orang yang jabatannya lebih tinggilah daripada yang diutus untuk ketemu Mamah itu. Mamah jawab, "Bilang pada Komandanmu saya tidak ada urusan dengan mereka, urusan saya hanya membela hak-hak adat". TNI itu kemudian berkata, "Ibu tidak takut pada kami?!" Kalau saya bawa senjata, saya tembak ibu, bagaimana?" Mamah menjawab lagi, "saya tidak takut! Saya takut sama Tuhan saja! Sayangi dirimu ya. Sayangi anak dan istrimu, saya punya pengacara di Ambon dan di Jakarta sekalipun". Hahaha TNI itu pun pergi, tapi besoknya komandannya atau mungkin yang jabatannya lebih tinggi dari yang kemarin datang lagi.*

'Before the National Inquiry, after Mamah spoke during the period PT MG was being introduced to the people, under the guise of Socialization of the Village Law, not long afterwards a TNI soldier came to the house. Mamah said, "Oh, how are you? Please do come in". The TNI man apparently asked Mamah to meet either his commander or a person whose position was higher than he who had been sent to meet Mamah. Mamah replied, "Tell your Commander my business is not with them, my sole concern is to defend customary rights". The TNI man then said, "You are not afraid of us, ma'am? If I was carrying a weapon and shot you, what would happen?" Mamah replied, "I am not afraid! I fear only God! Love yourself ... Love your child and wife, I have a lawyer in Ambon and even one in Jakarta". Hahaha the TNI soldier went away, but the next day the commander or maybe the one whose position was higher than the man yesterday, came again'. (Interview with Mamah Do, an indigenous woman of the Aru Islands).

At the time of the second visitation, Mamah Do was not home. The forms of intimidation have now begun to decrease since the Inquiry National.

*Bukan tidak ada, tapi bentuk-bentuk intimidasi dan teror mulai berkurang pasca Inkuiri Nasional.*

'It doesn't mean that it doesn't happen, but the forms of intimidation and terror have begun to wane post National Inquiry'. (Interview with Mika Ganobal, Aru Islands indigenous people, March 2013).

In a nutshell, the National Inquiry has had for the effect of increasing morale among the Aru Islands indigenous people in their struggle against the monsters in the form the companies that want to seize their traditional lands (*tanah adat*).

*[...] iya, jelas ada pengaruhnya itu Inkuiri. Masyarakat jadi merasa lebih diperhatikan oleh negara. Masyarakat menjadi merasa mendapat support secara moral.*

'[...] Yes, obviously the Inquiry has made a difference. The community feels that it is now paid more attention by the state. The community feels that they have received moral support'.

(Interview with Jacky Manuputti, the expert witness of the Aru Islands indigenous people during National Inquiry, in Dobo, 30 August 2014).

Psychologically, the National Inquiry has indeed had a marked effect on the enthusiasm and courage of the Aru Islands indigenous people in their fight

for their rights to their customary lands.

However, importantly what the Aru Islands indigenous people expect from the existence of National Inquiry is not its psychological support, they want policies that can block or even “kick out” companies that try to intrude into in the Aru Islands and set up their operations there. Nevertheless, the people think that even after the setting up of a black-and-white post-National Inquiry policy the situation is still extremely precarious. Although PT MG (as if) is no longer operating in the Aru Islands, the indigenous people feel unable to relax because they have not seen any policies that would revoke PT MG’s entry permits, et cetera, issued by the government.

‘PT MG has no clear status in the Aru Islands. We have never been seeing any written evidence such as policies or other documents that shows that PT MG or any other company has really left the Aru Islands’.

(Interview with Jacky Manuputti, the expert witness of the Aru Islands indigenous people during National Inquiry, in Dobo, March 2013).

#### SAVE ARU; TWO FACES IN ONE BODY

After the National Inquiry, the morale of the Aru Islands indigenous people, including those who have joined the local branch of the “Save Aru” to ensure solidarity in their fight to defend their customary forests, has been increasing, but there are differences of opinion in their responses to the plan to expand the Aru Border Regency. A potential for disunity about the plans to expand the area of the Aru Border Regency has become obvious in the local branch of the “Save Aru” campaign.

The solidarity of the Aru Islands indigenous people who also joined in Save Aru movement has now split into two sets of opinions, namely: the indigenous people who agree with plans to expand the Aru Border Regency and those people who are opposed to any such expansion. The solidarity of the local “Save Aru” campaign has been reinforced by three core movers, the local Save Aru Co-ordinator (Mika Ganobal), the local Save Aru Secretary (Alamsyah J. Kopin), and the local Save Aru Treasurer (Imran Patikaloba). The local “Save Aru” co-ordinator does not just oppose he strongly rejects the division of the borders of the Aru Border Regency, while the local secretary and treasurer of “Save Aru” are now members of the core team preparing for the division of the Aru Border District.

The Aru Islands indigenous people who are in favour of the planned expansion of the frontiera of the Aru Regency generally agree with views or reasons adduced to rationalize the splitting up of the district. These reasons have to do with the easier range of control, the overall strengthening of the defence and security of the Indonesian border region, an issue now also the focus of the Indonesian government under the leadership of President Jokowi, and the potential opening up of new jobs and infrastructure development, to name some of the principal arguments. Below are statements in the form of arguments for the expansion of the Aru Border District (Kabupaten Aru Perbatasan):

[...] jelas saja pemekaran itu tujuannya untuk rentang kendali toh, agar lebih mudah mengontrol desa-desa yang letaknya di pedalaman. Kalau sekarangkan susah, jauh sekali itu mengakses desa-desa yang di selatan. Ini juga kan sesuai toh dengan focus pemerintahan saat ini untuk memperkuat daerah-daerah perbatasan. Aru inikan termasuk pada daerah perbatasan. Kalau ada pemekaran, otomatis diperlukan tenaga kerja juga toh. PNS-PNS akan bertambah, pembangunan infrastruktur, ya begitulah.

'[...] it is clear that the goal of *pemekaran* (expansion) is to expand range of controls, to make it easier to keep an eye on villages in the interior. Now this is a difficult undertaking, especially for the villages in the south. It also accords with the current government's focus on strengthening the peripheral areas. Aru is part of this periphery [of Indonesia]. If the planned expansion goes ahead, there will automatically be a need for people to work there. The numbers of civil servants will increase, infrastructure development will follow, that's the way the cookie crumbles'. (Interview with M. Maya, Kepala Dinas Kehutanan Kabupaten Kepulauan Aru, in Dobo, 12 October 2014).

Those indigenous people who oppose the planned expansion of the Aru Border District area have cogent counter-arguments. They believe that after the division of the Southeast Maluku Regency, there will not be enough significant development in the Aru Islands Regency to benefit all people. The evidence they cite is the many underdeveloped villages already there in what is the third poorest district in Maluku Province.

[...] pertamanya untuk rentang kendali. Bayangkan saja, membuat KTP hanya seharga 15.000, tapi ongkos dari kampung menuju pusat Kota Dobo akan sangat mahal. Lalu juga, pemekaran ini prosesnya menjadi cepat tinggal menunggu pusat karena juga sesuai dengan fokus pemerintahan saat ini untuk memperkuat daerah-daerah perbatasan. Jika dimekarkan, maka pembangunan akan berkembang. Akan ada pembangunan infrastruktur, dan lain-lain, sehingga lapangan pekerjaan untuk masyarakat juga akan bertambah.

'[...] First the range control. Just imagine, obtaining a KTP (an official identity card) costs only 15,000, but the cost [of travelling] from a village to the centre of Dobo City is prohibitively expensive. Moreover, the planned expansion will be carried out [too] hastily, as it depends on the centre because it ties in with the current focus of the government, namely: to strengthen border areas. [The government] argues that when it has been achieved, development will flourish. The infrastructure will be improved *et cetera*, increasing employment opportunities for the people'. (Interview with Jammy Siarukin, Ketua Tim Pemekaran Kabupaten Kepulauan Aru, in Dobo, 2 June 2014).

Unhappily, although the Aru Islands have a rich and abundant store of resource potential, this has been squandered. The reason for this frittering away of this promise has been the failure of the Aru Islands Regional Government to get its act together and manage the resource potential of the Aru Islands properly. This emerges from the narrative of Jacky Manuputti below:

[...] *ada bahasan di kalangan beberapa birokrat Maluku bahwa Kabupaten Kepulauan Aru adalah contoh kegagalan pemekaran karena kenyataannya Kabupaten Kepulauan Aru juga tidak berkembang toh setelah pemekaran. Kabupaten Kepulauan Aru menjadi salah satu kabupaten paling miskin di Provinsi Maluku. Sehingga kemudian ada wacana agar Kabupaten Kepulauan Aru dikembalikan saja ke Kabupaten Induk, yakni Kabupaten Maluku Tenggara.*

‘[...] there has been talk among some Maluku bureaucrats that the Aru Islands Regency is an example of the failure of *pemekaran* because it seems that this regency has failed to make progress in the wake of the expansion. The Aru Islands Regency is one of the poorest districts in Maluku Province. This has given rise to the discourse that claims that it would be better for the Aru Islands Regency to be reabsorbed into the main regency, namely: that of Southeast Maluku’.  
(Interview with Jacky Manuputti, the expert witness of the Aru Islands indigenous people during National Inquiry).<sup>8</sup>

The section of the community that opposes the division of the Aru Border Regency also considers that, besides the failure of the Regional Government, other causes can be put forward to explain why the Aru Islands Regency is being left behind other districts in Maluku Province. For instance, the role of sub-districts has not been maximized in every region. The local government is suspected of having no really serious intention of expanding the work of the sub-district. The evidence cited for this are results of observations in the field that indicate that sub-district officials such as the *camats* (mayor of sub-district) do not even live in the area of his jurisdiction and prefer to reside in Dobo City. This is the burden of by Boy Darakay’s statement below.

[...] *masih adanya daerah-daerah tertinggal di Kepulauan Aru itu akar masalahnya bukan rentang kendali, melainkan belum maksimalnya peran kecamatan-kecamatan di Kabupaten Kepulauan Aru.*

‘[...] there are still disadvantaged areas in the Aru Islands that lie at the root of the problem and this has nothing to do with the range of control, instead it is because the role of *camats* is not maximized in the sub-districts in the Aru Islands Regency’.  
(Interview with Boy Darakay, Aru Islands indigenous people, in Dobo, 2 June 2014).

There are still many officials in the Aru Islands Regency who are implicated in corruption cases, like that brought against the district head and deputy-regent of the Aru Islands mentioned earlier during his term of office. The example of the late Teddy Tengko has also strengthened the belief current among the indigenous people that the best course of action is to oppose the division of the Aru Border Regency because to do this is considered by the elite to be nothing more than an invitation to indulge in corruption.

<sup>8</sup> Dhara Pos. 2015. “Termiskin ketiga di Maluku bukti buruknya kinerja Pemda Aru”, <http://www.dharapos.com/2015/07/termiskin-ke-3-di-maluku-bukti-buruknya.html>; accessed on 20-10-2018.

The Aru Islands indigenous people who are *pro-pemekaran* are adamant in their conviction that the presence of the TNI that would be required in border areas is necessary to strengthen national defence and security. Taking the opposite point of view, those opposed to *pemekaran* assume that the presence of the TNI will be the gap or door through which corporations (companies) will be able slip through to return to the Aru Islands. This presumption is based on the trauma they have suffered and learned from on earlier occasions, including the presence of PT MG in South Aru. While it was working there, PT MG used the Indonesian Navy's port as its airstrip (Amianti 2015).

The central and regional governments should review the plan for the expansion of the peripheral Aru District, suspected by many of being just another "face" of PT MG, intent on trying to re-enter the islands. It is important to note that the Minister of Agriculture, Amran Sulaiman, has stated that the government had allocated three locations with an area of around 500,000 hectares for the establishment of sugar-cane plantations in Indonesia, namely: the Aru Islands, Merauke, and Southeast Sulawesi.<sup>9</sup>

The Minister of Agriculture's statement contradicts the statement of the Minister of Forestry, Zulkifli Hasan, who has averred that the issuance of a permit for the expansion of sugar-cane plantations in the Aru Islands had been cancelled, because the soil was not suitable for growing this crop. Amran Sulaiman's utterance is taken as one piece of evidence that indicates that sugar-cane plantation companies have not gone for good and the government is still holding its hand protectively over the capitalists, in the shape of the companies that want to exploit resources in the Aru Islands.

Before the National Inquiry, one company blatantly claimed customary territory as a sugar-cane plantation concession area. After the National Inquiry, the giant corporations slowly seemed to disappear, even though still thought to be lurking in the background, preparing a refined strategy that would allow it to re-enter the territory to exploit its natural resources. Post National Inquiry, the owners of giant companies have not conceded defeat; they have merely changed their plans and are continuing to keep the Aru Islands forest in their sights to this day. The threat of deforestation by private corporations is a real problem and a challenge that must be faced by any in the Aru, the Indonesian and the international community at large who care about the preservation of forests in the Aru Islands as a "lung" for the world, a weapon combatting the effects of global warming and ozone depletion.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

Indonesia and Southeast Asia will be among the first areas affected by climate change. In simple terms, if the earth is getting hotter, the Antarctic icecap will melt and the sea level will inexorably rise. Among the first land areas to sink will be the smaller island groups in Indonesia, including Aru Islands, where, at this very moment the environment and forests are being threatened with

<sup>9</sup> *Thejakartapost.com*, 18-6-2015.

deforestation by the sugar-cane plantation and sugar factory projects of PT MG. The ambitions of private corporations to annex the forest areas in the Aru Islands to convert them into sugar-cane plantations, will not end, will not stop. The exploitative PT MG has become a scourge for the Aru people who care about preserving their forests and the environment. The civil society and the Maluku government must stop the sugar factory project and the sugar-cane operations proposed by PT MG and other corporations because they threaten the Aru Islands that are in grave danger of sinking if deforestation is permitted. Local officials and leaders as well as the Central Government must cancel their plans and stop these projects that are being stoutly resisted by the local people.

There is one way and one way only to thwart these ambitions: increase environmental awareness among the Aru Islands community and keep repeating the message loudly and strongly, reinforcing it, and developing it comprehensively. The people of the Aru Islands must share their stories with friends, family, and neighbours, spreading awareness about the natural resources around them that are threatened by the capitalist power of corporations and the private sector.

Creative forest management campaigns must continue to be carried out by the Aru Islands community, sending messages framed to convey proper invitations to participate in local languages and in the national and international languages so that they can be easily understood by communities in remote areas, in the capital city of Jakarta, and internationally.

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#### INTERVIEWS

- Interview with Mika Ganobal, Dobo, Kepulauan Aru, March 2013.
- Interview with Jacky Manuputti, Dobo, March 2013.
- Interview with Bapak Simon Kamsy, Dobo, March 2013.
- Interview with Jacky Manuputti, Dobo, October 2014.
- Interview with Mamah Do, Dobo, July 2014.
- Interview with Mika Ganobal, 2-4-2014.
- Interview with Jacky Manuputti, Dobo, 30-8-2014.
- Interview with M. Maya, Dobo, 12-10-2014.
- Interview with Jammy Siarukin, Dobo, 2-6-2014.
- Interview with Boy Darakay, Dobo, 2-6-2014.

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