
[Papua New Guinea: Customary Landowners' declaration on logging, mining and oil palm plantations](#)

In Popondetta, Oro Province, Papua New Guinea, representatives of all land owning communities from around the province gathered on 12th March 2004, in the first Oro landowners Forum on Land Rights and Community Based Natural Resource Management.

They committed to ensuring sustainable resource management and to protect their rights as the rightful owners of those resources, declaring that:

“Our futures as customary landowners are threatened in many ways by large scale developments which have taken place without our free, prior informed consent and full participation. Our Customary lands and the grasslands, lakes, small islands, forests and mountains which are also important and critical ecosystems have been invaded by logging, oil palm, fishing, mineral exploration and tourism developments which are undermining our survival. Expansion and intensification of the extractive industries alongside economic liberalization, free trade aggression, extravagant consumption and globalization are frightening signals of unsustainable greed.

Urgent actions must be taken by all, to reverse the social and ecological injustice arising from the violations of our rights as customary landowners which is recognized by the PNG constitution”.

“We the customary landowners reject the myth of sustainable oil palm and mining. We have not experienced oil palm developments and logging and mining to “ sustainable development” by any reasonable definition. Our experience and that of our fellow customary landowners in Papua New Guinea and around the world shows that expansion of monocultures including oil palm, large scale industrial logging, extraction of minerals, oil, gas, commercial fishing and large scale tourism developments bring serious social and environmental problems so widespread and injurious that we cannot describe such developments as sustainable. Indeed, rather than contributing to poverty alleviation, we find that these developments are creating poverty and social divisions in our communities and showing disrespect for our cultures and customary laws”.

They also put forward a set of recommendations, including:

“We call for a moratorium on large scale industrial logging, expansion of oil palm nucleus estates and mineral extractions that may affect us. Existing concessions should be frozen. There should be no further funding by international financial institutions (IFIs) such as the World Bank and Asian Development Bank and no new resource extraction industry initiative by the government and no new investments by companies until respect for customary rights, customary law, and our full and meaningful participation is assured.”

“All projects affecting our land should be subject to our free, prior and informed consent as expressed through our own representative institutions which should be afforded legal personality. The right to free, prior and informed consent should not be construed as a ‘veto’ on development but includes our right as customary landowners to say ‘no’ to projects that we consider injurious to

us as peoples who have inhabited these lands since time immemorial.”

“Poverty alleviation must start from our own definition and indicators of poverty and particularly addresses the exclusion and lack of access to decision making at all levels. Rather than being lack of money, resources and services such as health and education, poverty is also defined by power deficits, absence of access to decision making and management processes. Social and ecological inequalities and injustice breed and permeate the impoverishment of local people.”

“As customary landowners, we do not reject development, but we demand that our development be determined by ourselves according to our own priorities. Sustainable development for local communities is secured through the exercise of our own human and [land] rights and enjoying the respect and solidarity of all peoples. We are thus empowered to make our contributions and play a vital role in sustainable development.”

Excerpted and adapted from: “Oro Landowners Declaration on Large Scale Commercial Extraction of Natural Resources and the Expansion of Oil Palm Nucleus Estates”, sent by Sandy Gauntlett, E-mail: sandygauntlett@hotmail.com The full declaration can be accessed at <http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/PapuaNG/Oro.html>