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## [Dayak people win lawsuit in Indonesia](#)

Most fires that destroyed vast areas of the Indonesian tropical forest in 1997 were deliberately set by plantation companies to clear land. The government itself accused several companies as responsible for the fires. The consequences of the fires reached the regional level, producing concern in the neighbouring countries. Nevertheless, the most affected were local populations whose lands were appropriated by huge national and transnational corporations, converting forest and agricultural land into pulpwood or oil palm plantations (see WRM bulletin 9)

The Samihim Dayak people have won their lawsuit against seven subsidiaries of the widely diversified Salim Group over large-scale forest fires in South Kalimantan in 1997. The NGO Environmental Forum (WALHI), which helped the Dayak people in the legal process, said the Kota Baru District Court in South Kalimantan decided that the seven companies of the Group -PT Laguna Mandiri I, II, III, PT Langgeng Muara Makmur II, III, PT Paripurna Swakarsa I and PT Swadaya Andika II- were guilty of burning farming areas owned by local people. The court ordered the seven firms to pay Rp 150 million in compensation to the land owners.

WALHI informed that the burning was performed by the seven companies to convert the lands into oil palm plantations. "The fires later spread to nearby forests and also engulfed farming lands belonging to the Dayak people" states the document. Some 106 people of the Samihim Dayak tribe, accompanied by several lawyers from the environmental forum, filed the lawsuit at the court in June 1998.

This is the third time that plantation companies are found guilty of burning forests belonging to the local people. WALHI and 12 other NGOs also won two other lawsuits against forest concession holders over forest fires in North and South Sumatra last year. WALHI considers that the above referred companies are only a few of the 176 firms announced by the Ministry of Forestry and Plantations to have been involved in forest fires in these two provinces in 1997. The Forum also urged the government to investigate the other companies and called on the Ministry of Forestry and Plantations to evaluate further granting of licenses to forest concession holders.

Source: 31/5/99; "Dayak people win lawsuit against Salim Group" Jakarta Post, 1/6/99.