
[The lack of transparency behind Indonesia's New Capital project and how the false rethoric of "Sponge City" is used to hide violations against the Balik People](#)

In a Press Release in [Indonesian](#) and [English](#), JATAM East Kalimantan denounces the recent move of the Indonesian Minister of Public Works and Public Housing, Basuki Hadimoeljono, to appeal against the decision of a State Administrative Court in Jakarta that the government should make public a number of documents that it had kept secret.

The documents refer to the construction of the new capital of Indonesia (abbreviated in Indonesian as IKN) in the province of East Kalimantan. In particular, the approval of the construction of dam and water intake projects to ensure the new capital's giant water demand and also the environmental impact assessment documents of these respective projects. Keeping such documents secret is a crime against transparency and accountability, the Press Release denounces, and in total contradiction to what a project, paid with public money and, according to the government, in the public interest, should be doing.

JATAM East Kalimantan opened the court case in October 2022. During one and a half year the government created all kinds of obstacles for the case to advance. Nevertheless, in March 2024, JATAM East Kalimantan finally won the case, although partly.

The government has been advertising the new capital as a "Smart city" and a "Forest city". And also as a "Sponge city", a city capable to even increase water availability by 'harvesting' and 'storing' water. It has received financial support for the idea from the Asian Development Bank and hired the Dutch consultancy company DELTARES to assist in its implementation. Calling IKN a "Sponge city" is a way to respond to criticisms that the new capital will aggravate the water crisis that is affecting the region and the whole of Kalimantan, due to decades of deforestation and other destructive impacts, like water contamination, of logging, oil palm plantation and mining companies.

JATAM denounced to the Minister of Foreign Economic Relations of the Netherlands, Michiel Sweers, during his visit to IKN on 26 April, 2024, the harsh and violent reality that the Indigenous Balik People are facing. According to JATAM, the character of "harvesting water" is based, in reality, on engineering and water infrastructure works inside the Balik territory to ensure the huge water demand of the new capital, and in the total detriment of the needs of the Balik People. Balik women and men not only lost their access to water and the rivers they depend on, the several water works built so far have been destroying profound social, economic, cultural and spiritual relations they nurture with the rivers in the area.

For more information, see the Press Release in [English](#) and [Indonesian](#).

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