

Historic gathering in South Papua brings voices of resistance and stories of dispossession

From 11 to 14 March 2025, over 250 participants from across Indonesia, including Indigenous Peoples and local communities, gathered in a historic national gathering in Merauke, South Papua. The conference was held to consolidate the voices and experiences of communities affected by National Strategic Projects (PSN) and to strengthen resistance against state-backed development programs that continue to displace and harm people and the environment. The conference was organised by Solidaritas Merauke, with the support of various allied organizations.

This national convergence took place in Merauke, which once was the center of the failed Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate (MIFEE) project and a symbol of the destructive legacy of large-scale agribusiness. The gathering opened with community testimonies that highlighted how PSNs have led to land grabs, environmental degradation, militarization, and the erosion of Indigenous food systems and cultural life. Participants shared stories of dispossession, spiritual and physical violence, and criminalization. These narratives served as a powerful foundation for collective analysis, strategy formulation and resistance.

The conference allowed affected communities, including women and survivors of violence, to speak openly about their experiences. Women played a central role throughout, sharing how development aggression has impacted them and their communities, and offering alternative ways of organizing grounded in care, spirituality, and Indigenous knowledge. Discussions over the four days explored the impacts of PSNs on land, food sovereignty, and cultural survival, as well as strategies to confront militarization, shrinking civic space, and the criminalization of defenders. Participants worked in thematic groups to develop joint advocacy strategies, focusing on grassroots organizing, participatory mapping, legal resistance, and alliance-building with customary institutions, churches, and civil society groups.

One of the most powerful outcomes of the conference was the drafting and endorsement of [the Solidaritas Merauke Declaration](#). This collective statement denounces the ongoing plunder of Indigenous and community lands under the guise of national development. It describes the PSNs as a continuation of colonial violence, now masked by state policies, legal reforms, and false promises of prosperity. The declaration paints a vivid picture of ecological and cultural destruction, asserting that communities are losing not only their land but also their identity, sacred places, and ways of life. It calls for a total halt to PSNs and demands the return of robbed wealth and the restoration of people's health and territories. The declaration also warns of a looming social-ecological crisis that could engulf the archipelago from Papua to Sumatra if these destructive projects continue.

Through this conference, affected communities and allied movements reaffirmed their commitment to stand together, defend life, and build a just future rooted in Indigenous sovereignty, ecological balance, and solidarity.