

**61st Session of the Human Rights Council
Item 3: General Debate**

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Delivered by: Mlada Simper

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Mr. President,

We are concerned about the human rights impacts of the Merauke National Strategic Project in South Papua, Indonesia. The project aims to cultivate rice and sugarcane across 2 million hectares, on the customary lands of the Marind, Marind Maklew, Yej, Kimaam and Kanum Peoples. By the end of 2025, more than 42,000 hectares of forest were cleared. The project's implementation could make it the world's largest deforestation project.

In late 2025, the Indonesian Ministry of Forestry decided to reclassify 487,000 hectares of forest as non-forest land to expand the project into neighbouring Boven Digoel, Mappi and Asmat Regencies. It now includes plans for palm oil, corn and cattle farming. The decision to reclassify was issued without consultation with the Indigenous population.

The project is already having serious impacts on the livelihood, food security, culture and way of life of Indigenous Papuans. Deforestation is leading to the loss of Sago trees, an Indigenous staple food source. It also creates horizontal conflict between communities, including land conflicts. Increasing militarisation is exposing communities to physical and mental threats and intimidation.

We urge the Government of Indonesia to:

1. Suspend the Merauke National Strategic Project, pending a comprehensive and independent assessment of its human rights and environmental impacts on Indigenous communities.
2. Adopt the Indigenous Peoples Bill, with a view to recognising and protecting the rights of Indigenous Peoples in line with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Thank you.