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INDONESIA: IPRI URGES AUTHORITIES TO IMMEDIATELY DROP CRIMINAL CHARGES AGAINST ARRESTED INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Indigenous Peoples Rights International (IPRI), a global indigenous organization, strongly condemns the recent arrest of and trumped-up charges against six indigenous villagers in Kinipan village in Central Kalimantan, Indonesia.

Amid the pandemic, six Indigenous villagers which include Laman Kinipan chief Effendi Buhing and two Indigenous youth, were arrested by the Central Kalimantan Police for defending their customary forest against the expansion of PT Sawit Mandiri Lestari (PT SML), a palm oil company. Buhing was arrested on August 26, while the other five were arrested on August 15.

With strong global support and media attention, all six were released by authorities but they were reportedly charged for stealing from the palm oil company that forcibly evicted the members of Laman Kinipan community from their ancestral land.

According to reports of *Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara - AMAN* (National Alliance of Indigenous Peoples of the Archipelago – Indonesia), the Laman Kinipan community found out that their forest was being encroached on PT SML in April 2018. Consequently, the community imposed customary sanctions against the company after it destroyed their customary territory. They also filed complaints to the Lamandau Regent, Lamandau Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah (DPRD), and Central Kalimantan governor.

AMAN Secretary General Rukka Sombolinggi said that representatives of Laman Kinipan community had complained to the national government in Jakarta several times but no serious action was taken.

She said that they have been to the Ministry of Agrarian and Spatial Planning, the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, the National Commission on Human Rights, and the Presidential Palace through the KSP.

“The President must immediately order Chief of Police to stop criminalization of Indigenous Peoples, and the Ministry of Environment and Forestry to revoke concession of PT SML in Laman Kinipan’s territory,” Sombolinggi said.

IPRI expressed its solidarity with the Kinipan community in their struggle to defend their customary forests from PT SML, and with AMAN, the world’s largest national Indigenous Peoples organization, in its efforts to protect Indigenous Peoples rights in Indonesia.

“The incident exposed the double standard of the police forces in protecting the vested interest of companies instead of protecting the people while the government turns a blind eye to the plight of the Kinipan community. This is an act of injustice and inconsistent with the human rights obligations and commitments of the government of Indonesia,” IPRI Global Co-Director Joan Carling said.

Carling added that the criminalization incident in Indonesia is unfortunately common for many Indigenous Peoples globally.

“Criminalization of and violence against Indigenous Peoples, in the context of large-scale projects involving agribusiness and extractive industries, have become rampant, despite the COVID-19 pandemic that has severely affected Indigenous Peoples,” Carling noted.

She added, “Access to justice for victims and their families is almost impossible. This may have even gotten worse in the coming months as states and companies take over the lands and resources of indigenous peoples in the name economic recovery from the pandemic.”

Together with AMAN, IPRI released a sign-on statement for the public to support the demand to drop criminal charges against the arrested Kinipan villagers, and to call on the Indonesian government to suspend the operations of PT SML and investigate its business practices.

The sign-on statement also seeks to put an end to criminalization of Indigenous Peoples in Indonesia and express global solidarity for the protection of Indigenous Peoples rights.

“IPRI is committed to respond to this global crisis of criminalization, violence, and impunity against Indigenous Peoples by increasing global awareness and amplifying call for justice,” Carling concluded.