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A WATER JUSTICE TOOLKIT

Although the month of March is over, some of its many themes stay with us throughout the year and one of the most important ones for the survival of humanity is water. We celebrated World Water Day on March 22, but water is a continuing concern as we face the problems of its waste, its scarcity and its privatization through corporate take-overs in many areas of the world. Water must remain in the public domain if it is to be shared for the good of all. Over five years ago the United Nations General Assembly recognized water and sanitation as human rights and recommended that governments pay special attention to vulnerable communities taking steps to ensure that they have access to clean water.

A joint effort of organizations and grass roots groups from around the world that are loosely connected through the global water justice movement has produced a **water justice toolkit**. This is a practical guide, in three parts, that can be downloaded and used at a community level. It also provides an alternative vision for improving the water system. The third part focuses on public financing to ensure just and sustainable water infrastructure. Even in Canada where we have a large supply of the world's fresh water, there is a need to protect and preserve it for future generations. In my local community many grassroots groups are involved in struggles against deep water wells used for irrigation because they deplete the water table. We are asking for a New Water Act that will protect the water table for future generations.

What follow are some quotes from the website referenced below.

‘The global water justice movement has been successful over the decades in connecting local communities and frontline activists to broader struggles against the global neoliberal agenda. A passion for water has been at the heart of the struggles against trade agreements, unsustainable development projects and environmentally destructive extractive operations. Both in the global North and South, this passion for water has politicized and mobilized impacted communities.

‘Despite the tremendous victories of the past few decades, the global water justice movement is facing increasing threats as the world runs out of fresh water and corporations take advantage of the environmental and financial crisis to cement their access to dwindling supplies. In September 2014 the Blue Planet Project and allies held a meeting to take stock of new and emerging threats and to develop joint strategies to address the threats.

‘The idea of an online water justice toolkit emerged from those discussions as a strategy to consolidate our knowledge base and support local campaigns against the corporate takeover of water. ‘Public Water for All’ is the first module and includes tools to support local campaigns to defend and reclaim public water and sanitation services. The tools can be downloaded and used in a variety of ways: in meetings with elected officials and decision-makers; to inform the public; to facilitate community discussions; and for training local activists.’

Source: Mary Boyd (Canada)
www.blueplanetproject.net/index.php/water-justice-toolkit

THE GREAT TIMBER HEIST

The logging industry in Papua New Guinea

Papua New Guinea (PNG) has become the world's largest exporter of tropical wood (most of it to China) surpassing Malaysia, which had held the top spot for the past several decades. PNG reached first place after expanding the exploitation of its forest resources in recent years through a legal mechanism called Special Agriculture and Business Leases (SABLs). The SABL scheme was officially intended for agricultural projects but in reality was widely used by logging companies to access new forest resources. The Commission of Inquiry (CoI) established by the government in 2011 to investigate SABL land deals found widespread lack of free, prior and informed consent of the local people; failure of state agencies to perform their duties; fraud, misconduct, and incompetence; and overall lack of adherence to proper procedures. In June 2014, Prime Minister Peter O'Neill announced that all illegal deals would be cancelled. Yet, to date, the government has not taken any decisive action to cancel deceptive land deals, stop illegal logging, or return land to traditional owners.

But the SABLs are only part of the story of exploitation of PNG. More than one third of the country's 46 million hectares is now in the hands of foreign, mostly logging, companies, who are facing growing resistance and scarcity of timber in other countries. PNG supposedly enjoys the most equal distribution of land on earth and is governed by a constitution that protects people's customary land rights and the environment. However, the Oakland Institute, a policy research organisation in California, has produced a report and film *On Our Land*, which assert that logging in PNG constitutes a multilayered tragedy of betrayal of the people's constitutional protections and loss of cultural heritage and land for millions of Papua New Guineans. All over the country, local communities are being deprived of their resources and their rights while their government fails to protect them from the deceptive practices of the forest industry, and police working on behalf of logging companies. The Oakland Institute, has uncovered data that suggest rampant tax evasion and financial misreporting in the forestry sector.

Tax filings cited in the report show that 16 local subsidiaries of the Malaysian conglomerate, Rimbunan Hijau Group — the largest player in the local timber sector accounting for at least one quarter of exports — have declared operating losses almost every year since 2000. As a result, most had paid no corporate income tax in 15 years, the report said. But the supposed losses came as local exports have boomed, nearly doubling since 2009 to almost 4 million cubic meters per year. If it were legitimately unprofitable to log and export timber from PNG, why would they continue their operations? The report suggests that logging companies have been undervaluing their exports and overpricing their costs. Taken together, the underpayment of corporate tax and export duties could amount to depriving this impoverished country of \$100m. per year of needed state revenues.

With a population of 8 million, Papua New Guinea is among the poorer countries in the world. Life expectancy is under 63 years and the infant mortality rate is high at 47.3 for every 1,000 live births, according to the United Nations.

Recently published research from the Remote Sensing Centre at the University of Papua New Guinea concluded that between 2002 and 2014 the country's forests were disappearing at an annual rate of 0.49%. Alex Allison, senior zoologist at the University of Hawaii and an expert on biodiversity in PNG, says that the hardest-hit areas are in the heavily logged island provinces off the northeast coast of the mainland. The 14,000-square-mile island of New Britain, the largest in the Bismarck Archipelago at about the size of Taiwan, was once virtually blanketed with forest. But by 2012 only 30% remained after decades of heavy logging and commercial agriculture and more than 90% of the remainder has been allocated in logging concessions.

PNG plays a crucial role in the global climate, according to researchers from the Petersburg Nuclear Physics Institute in Russia, and deforestation there may disturb maritime weather patterns in the Southeast Asia-Pacific

region, which help regulate global temperatures.

Allison also says that Papua New Guinea contains about 5% of all the world's biodiversity — an extremely high share given that it is only about the size of California. For example, while the entire USA is known to contain about 600 species of reptile and amphibian, PNG alone contains about twice as many.

The findings of this research call for authorities such as PNG's Internal Revenue Commission, responsible for collecting taxes and enforcing tax regulations, to take urgent action to defend the interests and rights of PNG citizens.

Source: Oakland Institute Report, Corruption threat to Pacific Island forests, Feb. 2016.
www.oaklandinstitute.org Compiled by Alison Healey.

DEEP SEA MINING

Scientists call for temporary halt to new permits

A policy paper published in *Science* in July 2015 asked authorities not to approve any more underwater mining contracts until more environmental controls are put in place. The paper was timed to appear while the International Seabed Authority (ISA) was holding its annual session in Kingston, Jamaica. The ISA has already issued exploration permits to both national and private companies all eager to get a piece of the action, even while the Authority has not yet determined how to impose some environmental regulation on the underwater mining industry.

Deep-sea mining of the ocean floor is still very much in the exploration phase. Nautilus Minerals, one of the leading deep sea mining companies, expects to start mining after 2017 when it hopes to have completed testing its underwater machinery. The advantages of underwater mining are that there is potentially a lot of resources there needed for high-tech devices. And by using remote controlled machines instead of human miners, deep sea mining has the potential to be safe for humans – but what of its impact on the environment?

The scientists want the ISA to hold off on issuing new permits until a network of protected marine areas can be put in place, potentially safeguarding an environment that we know very little about. They warn that deep sea environments tend to recover very slowly when disturbed, some so slowly that they likely wouldn't recover in a human's lifetime, if ever. A European team of scientists announced in 2015 that they propose to make a study of the ecological effects of deep

sea mining on the environment and organisms living on the seafloor. Clearly, scientific research is well behind commercial exploration.

The next annual meeting of ISA is due in July 2016.

Source: www.popsoci.com/some-scientists-urge-caution-underwater-mining.
Reported by Mary Beth Griggs, 18 July 2015.

Nautilus Minerals begin wet-testing their underwater mining machines

Nautilus Minerals is an Australian-Canadian mining company with some leading global resource corporations among its major shareholders. It is currently focussed on a seafloor copper-gold project in the South West Pacific. Here the company describes the trio of remote-controlled vehicles it will start testing in the second half of this year 2016 in Oman. Reputedly the first of their kind in the world, these machines are each about 50 feet long and weigh around 300 tonnes apiece.

‘The Auxiliary Cutter is the pioneering machine which prepares the rugged sea bed for the more powerful Bulk Cutter. These two machines gather the excavated material; the third vehicle, the Collecting Machine, will collect the cut material by drawing it in as seawater slurry with internal pumps and pushing it through a flexible pipe to the subsea pump and on to a Production Support Vessel via a riser system. Following dewatering of the material on the vessel, a state of the art cargo handling system will be used to load the

dewatered material into four storage holds. It will then recover the material from the storage holds and transfer it directly to a vessel for shipment of the material to China.'

Source: Conrad Prabhu, Feb. 2016, omanobserver.om/oman-emerging-as-key-base-for-worlds-first-seafloor-mining/
Compiled by Alison Healey.

TWO QUOTATIONS ON WORLD TRADE JUSTICE

Pope Paul VI, Populorum Progressio (Development of peoples), 1967

'The principle of free trade, by itself, is no longer adequate for regulating international agreements...When the nations involved are far from equal, market prices that are freely agreed upon can turn out to be most unfair....The teaching set forth by our predecessor Leo XIII in *Rerum Novarum* is still valid today: when two parties are in very unequal positions, their mutual consent alone does not guarantee a fair contract... Now in trade relations between the developing and the highly developed economies there is a great disparity in their overall situation and in their freedom of action. In order that international trade be human and moral, social justice requires that it restore to the participants a certain equality of opportunity.'

The Transnational Institute

'Over the past 40 years of neoliberal capitalism we have witnessed transnational corporations (TNCs) emerge as major global forces exercising unprecedented and unaccountable economic and political power. This power is expressed through accumulated wealth.. . TNCs operate to control major areas of 'the commons' and human activities, such as food production, land, natural resources, energy, water, health, public services and finance through a global resources grab. They act with widespread impunity despite the devastating social, economic and environmental impacts of their operations. Furthermore, among the top 25 corporations classified by revenue, 15 are linked to the fossil fuels industry, which is responsible for the greenhouse gas emissions that bring the whole planet to environmental collapse through climate change.

Corporate impunity is ensured through a trade and Investment regime incorporated into binding international agreements, such as the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (USA and EU), the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (Canada and EU), the Transpacific Partnership, the Trade in Services Agreement, the Economic Partnership Agreements (EU and African, Caribbean and Pacific nations) and other European and USA free trade agreements with South East Asian, Latin and Central American countries. This framework of agreements provides instruments of corporate investor protection and privilege (ISDS) while denying protection to public interest and peoples' rights.'

**Contributions to Bulletin and responses to its content welcomed.
Deadline: 14th of each month. Publication office in Sydney.**

The Bulletin is currently produced by two networks: *Justice and Trade Agreements* and *Human Trafficking*.
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Design: Thanks to Marian Kelly for her donation of time and talent.