

# THE SUMBA DECLARATION OF ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE

**The 14th National Environmental Summit  
Wahana Lingkungan Hidup Indonesia**

**September 20, 2025**



# Preface

**F**rom Sumba Island, in the east of the country, we gather at the 14th WALHI National Environmental Summit. Here, the voices of indigenous peoples, farmers, fishermen, women, young people, academics, artists, journalists and victims of ecological disasters come together as one. We bear witness to the crisis afflicting the earth and its people, and we declare a single resolution: the direction of this country's development must be reversed.

We reject a development model that treats the earth solely as a commodity. We demand a new order that is ecologically, socially, economically, politically, and culturally just, because only then can life survive and children have a future.

# The Torn Promise of Independence

Eighty years ago, the Proclamation of Independence on August 17, 1945 promised protection for all people and the motherland. However, eight decades later, that promise has faded. The ecological crisis has impacted all dimensions of society. Compounding this is the deteriorating state of the planet.

Humanity is now caught in a triple planetary crisis: climate crisis, biodiversity crisis, and pollution crisis. Geopolitical tensions, particularly the Russia-Ukraine war and instability in the Gulf region, have made the world increasingly dependent on fossil fuels. At the same time, the production of single-use plastics continues to increase and poison the soil, water, and air we breathe. Ironically, global political commitments lag far behind scientific facts; more than 70% of NDCs are not in line with the 1.5°C target, developed countries' climate funding promises have not been fulfilled, and plastic agreements have not materialized.

Indonesia is not only a victim but also a contributor to this crisis: nickel and coal expansion, deforestation for palm oil and food, and plastic industry subsidies are exacerbating ecological damage. If left unchecked, the world is heading for 2.7°C warming, which will multiply disasters and hit young generations, especially in the Global South.

WALHI's 2024 Environmental Outlook shows that since 1998, at least 31.9 million hectares of forest have been handed over by the state to companies, triggering destruction. Between 2001 and 2024, Indonesia lost 32 million hectares of tree cover compared to 2000, which means that every minute, an area of forest equivalent to 3.6 soccer fields disappeared from the map.

Indonesia ranks second in the world in contributing to greenhouse gas emissions from deforestation, accounting for about 20 percent of total global emissions from this sector between 2013 and 2022. On average, emissions from Indonesia's land-use, land-use change, and forestry (LULUCF) sector reach 1 GtCO<sub>2</sub>e per year, nearly half of the country's total emissions (Climate Action Tracker, 2024).

The rate of biodiversity loss in this country is also very high. In 2021, there were 189 fauna species in Indonesia categorized as Critically Endangered. The Komodo dragon, for example, rose in status from "Vulnerable" to "Endangered." More than a third (30%) of the 138,374 species assessed by the IUCN are now on the list of threatened species. The threat has grown in recent years, mainly because the main biodiversity zone in the Wallacea region is experiencing an average deforestation rate of 1.23% per year. (Maria Voigt, et. al., Environmental Research Letters, 2021).

In terms of plastic pollution, which is also one of the "three planetary crises" alongside the climate crisis and biodiversity loss, Indonesia is also a major global contributor. Indonesia is the second largest contributor of plastic waste to the ocean (Jambeck et al., Science, 2015). On the other hand, Indonesians consume an average of 13 grams of microplastics per



month, the highest in the world (Xiang Zhao et al., Environmental Science & Technology, 2024).

This shows the vulnerability of Indonesian society to ecological disasters. Data from the National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB) also shows that there are at least 3,500 ecological disasters per year, including floods, landslides, and fires.

Ecological disasters triggered by excessive natural resource extraction clearly bring disaster to the people. In 2025, 23.85 million people will still live below the poverty line (BPS). This shows that although our natural wealth is being exploited, the profits flow to a handful of elites, while the people must bear the suffering. The natural resources sector has also become a fertile ground for oligarchic corruption.

It is clear that this crisis is the result of wrong political and economic choices, development that pursues illusory growth, an extractive economy that hides the costs of damage, power concentrated in the hands of the oligarchy, and laws that are subservient to capital.

The argument often put forward by the oligarchy that “developed countries also destroyed their environment in the past” is misguided and dangerous. The planet is now at the limits of its carrying capacity. There is no more room to repeat the mistakes of history.

Instead of perpetuating the destruction that will lead us deeper into ecological disaster, we demand ecological justice.

# The Path to Ecological Justice

Ecological justice is both an idea and a compass for struggle. It places humans, nature, and future generations on an equal footing. Ecological justice is not just a matter of sustainability, but a matter of the right to life.

We affirm:

1. That the earth and all its ecosystems have the right to live and recover.
2. That future generations have the right to inherit a livable earth together.
3. That natural resources must be used fairly, not monopolized by a small elite.
4. That the people have the right to determine the direction of development, not to be victims of unilateral decisions.
5. That indigenous peoples, farmers, fishermen, women, and young people are the guardians of knowledge and living spaces; their right to manage resources must be protected.
6. That a just and democratic energy transition must be a key pillar, moving away from dependence on fossil fuels that destroy the earth.

Articles 28H and 33 of the 1945 Constitution provide a clear mandate: the state must protect the people and manage the land, water, and natural resources to the greatest extent possible for the prosperity of the people. We demand that this promise be fulfilled.

# Principles of the Struggle

1. We stand on the belief that ecological justice is not merely an environmental issue, but a social, cultural, political, and economic struggle.
2. We reject neoliberalism, reject green imperialism, and reject development that displaces people for the sake of capital.
3. We refuse to compromise with environmental destruction.
4. We choose to stand with those who are most oppressed.
5. We believe that change can only come from solidarity across islands, communities, generations, and nations.

## Call to Action

1. We call on the government: stop land grabbing, recognize and protect people's rights to living space, water, and managed areas. We call on civil society: unite, because without unity, there will be no change.
2. We call on academics and journalists: use your knowledge to defend life, not market interests.
3. We call on the global community: stop green imperialism and development projects that seize our land and sea.
4. We call on the younger generation: take action, because the future will not wait.

To affirm this commitment, we **designate September 20 as National Ecological Justice Day** and **urge the government to promote it as International Ecological Justice Day.**

# Closing

This declaration is not the end, but the beginning of a long journey to claim the future. We know the road ahead is steep, but we choose to walk it together.

The earth is not an inheritance from our ancestors, but a gift for future generations. Let us stop the exploitation, let us reclaim life. We are not fighting nature; we are fighting greed.

For a just, sustainable, and dignified Indonesia.

Sumba, September 20, 2025