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PANG supports demand for World Bank to end its support for resource grab

The Pacific Network on Globalization (PANG) supports the recent demand by non-governmental organisations for the World Bank to end its support for land and resources grab in Pacific communities under the pretext of making customary land more productive.

Over 180 organisations, including NGOs, unions, farmer and consumer groups from over 80 countries have demanded the World Bank use its recent meeting in Washington to end its concept of “Doing Business rankings” and its support of illegal resource grabbing by major foreign corporations.

PANG Coordinator, Maureen Penjueli says the World Bank is facilitating land grabs in the Pacific by putting the interests of foreign investors before those of the people.

“The concept of World Bank’s Doing Business rankings encourages Pacific Island Governments to ease processes for foreign investors with the so called aim of creating a sound and good environment for business.

What’s good for business however isn’t necessarily good for Pacific peoples, their land and their environments, in fact much of what the World Bank endorses as good for business comes at the expense of the Pacific people,” argues Penjueli.

We have seen how the World Bank’s Doing Business ranking is clearly linked to our own government’s policies of freeing up land for productive use. It has pushed people further into poverty by taking away land and people’s way of life, she adds.

Doing Business ranks economies based on the regulatory environment that exists for establishing and operating businesses. The rankings include indexes on registering property, protecting investors, paying taxes and trading across borders amongst others. In most cases the fewer regulations that are in effect the higher the rank.

A total of 189 countries were ranked and the “Pacific is generally scoring badly, one of the reasons being our customary land tenure systems which is perceived as an impediment to economic development and a barrier to foreign investment. For Pacific Island Governments to improve their rankings they have to “make land productive”, “make land work” and so governments are reforming customary land

tenure to facilitate foreign investment and to ease foreign investors doing business in the Pacific.

Essentially land grabbing is then occurring when these systems are undermined and exploited by processes like Special Agriculture Business Lease in Papua New Guinea (SABL), and other land reform schemes enforced in the Solomon Islands, Fiji and Vanuatu ,” says Penjueli.

PANG says the terrible outcomes of such business environments include the illegal land grab taking place in the Pacific is in Papua New Guinea, with over 5 million hectares of customary land taken from local people without people’s consent for commercial use.

“The PNG Government has used the concept of Special Agriculture and Business Leases (SABLs) to free up customary land for commercial use, and foreign companies have unlawfully been given 99 year rights to an astonishing 12 percent of Papua New Guinea’s total landmass,” says Bismark Ramu Group Campaigner, Rosa Koian.

One of the signatories calling for the abolishment of the ranking, Amadou Kanoute, Director of CICODEV Africa commented that "Doing Business ranking is a sword of Damocles over the heads of our leaders who wait for their next score in the ranking to gain legitimacy before the international financial institutions, those who prescribe development schemes for our countries, instead of the citizens. We want our autonomy to decide the future of our land, agricultural and food policies.”

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