



POSITION STATEMENT

National Land Summit 2019

'Our Land. Their Profits. Our Enslavement'

The government's National Land Summit 2019 is intended to spark a new land grab on behalf of multi-national companies, commercial banks and other foreign interests.

The government is trying to justify its actions using the false argument that customary land is unutilized and a barrier to development, when exactly the opposite is true: customary land is the only resource on which our people can build a secure future.

The government has also shown numerous times, including with the SABL land grab, that it lacks the capacity to handle complex land issues and cannot be trusted to ensure people's rights and interests and the environment are protected.

People are the key to growth

Customary land already provides employment for 3 million farmers and supports an economy worth K40 billion a year.

Customary land also supports the production of fresh, healthy locally food that helps prevent lifestyle diseases and reduces the demand on health services.

Rather than trying to 'mobilize' customary land by taking it away from the people, the government should be mobilizing rural people and empowering them to develop their existing and new agriculture and horticulture businesses and other small and medium industries.

This is exactly the development path laid out in our Constitution and is the only way to ensure we achieve a 'smart, wise, fair, healthy and happy society' by 2050.

The government should be defending customary land ownership and helping local businesses to boost production and to access national and international markets.

This means providing extension services to nurture new enterprises and help increase productivity, providing better transport and storage infrastructure, supporting processing and value adding and protecting local producers from unfair foreign competition.

Products like vanilla, cocoa, honey, coconut oil, spices, fruits and vegetables, poultry, beef and fish can all be very successfully produced on customary land and have great potential for import substitution and boosting export earnings.

Our continued population growth, only makes maintaining local control over customary land even more vital.

Government cannot be trusted

History shows that the government simply cannot be trusted with the administration of customary land, the SABL land grab is just one example.

Government is unable to deal with land issues in a way that respects people's rights, ensures they benefit and protects the environment.

The Department of Lands and whole land administration system is riddled with corruption and mismanagement and is underfunded, especially at the provincial level. It will take considerable time, political will and substantial resources to make meaningful improvements but the government is showing no signs it is willing to make this investment.

Indeed, the government has still not reversed the huge SABL land grab which was an attempt to 'mobilize' customary land on behalf of the logging and oil palm industries, and it has still not resolved the complex land issues around the LNG project.

The government cannot even manage its own state land properly and clearly cannot be trusted with what is our nation's most valuable asset, customary land.

Conclusion

Land mobilization is just a euphemism for land grabbing by foreign multi-national companies.

The National Land Summit is a cover for promoting the interests of a global elite and further increasing their wealth rather than doing what is best for customary landowners and Papua New Guinea as a proud and independent nation.

Rather than 'mobilizing' customary land the government should focus on mobilizing and empowering rural people.

ACT NOW!

February 12, 2019