

**Jojo Mehta, Stop Ecocide International Foundation
Launch, West Papua's Green State Vision, Glasgow, 4 November 2021**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B_wocZfge3E (time code 47:00—54:26)

It feels very inspiring to be talking about this growing movement to support making destruction of nature an international crime, particularly in Scotland, because Polly Higgins who did so much to publicise this concept and move it forward, was my dear friend and we worked very closely together, and she was born in Glasgow.

The public campaign to stop ecocide began in 2017 as a grass roots campaign to add mass damage and destruction of nature, or ecocide, to the list of international crimes alongside Genocide, War Crimes, and Crimes Against Humanity.

Four years on as humanity faces the unprecedented threat of climate and ecological breakdown we find ourselves at the heart of a fast-growing movement to support this additional to international criminal law.

And the root we pursue is that of amending the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court to include a crime of Ecocide.

We all know that you can't apply to a government to kill people for your new business, much as in practice this killing can happen, as West Papuans are tragically aware.

But we know it's profoundly wrong and would never think to suggest it. However, we don't yet recoil in the same healthy way from destroying the natural world. Criminalising serious harm to nature at the highest level provides a strong moral foundation for that by creating individual criminal responsibility for key decision-makers at the highest level.

And as ecocidal activities often take place in the global south and in poorer communities, while the key decisions are taken in the wealthy north, this law presents a hugely re-balancing potential within criminal justice for addressing issues of climate justice.

And also it acts as a strong complement to the recently approved universal right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment, which was just approved by the UN Human Rights Council a couple of weeks ago.

Now our right to life is protected, or should be protected, by the fact that to take that life is a crime. And so creating a crime of Ecocide is a complement to the right to a clean and healthy environment. And it's also a complement to the rights of all human beings.

As of June this year [2021] there is a legal definition of ecocide, drafted by a top international panel of criminal and environmental lawyers that was convened by our foundation. And the core text is very simple. Most environmental regulation goes on for pages and pages, about exactly how many toxins you can use in what context. This comes down to one sentence: **Ecocide means unlawful or wanton acts committed with the knowledge that there is a substantial likelihood of severe and either widespread or longterm damage to the environment being caused by those acts.** It's as simple as that. It's simple and clear. It's based strongly on legal precedence. And it addresses the worst harms while also taking into account existing laws, and re-enforcing environmental laws that may be different in different jurisdictions.

And as Benny Wenda so brilliantly explained, West Papua is home to some of the world's most extensive pristine rain forest, as well as some of world's biggest reserves of gold and copper. And

so it is no wonder that Ecocide is deeply relevant to this territory, and also no wonder that the occupying power covets that territory so much.

It therefore feels both right and necessary that today's proposal by the United Liberation Movement of West Papua and Provisional Government should include a crime of ecocide in its vision for an independent West Papuan Green State. It is a law that is in alignment with the indigenous principles of care for all beings.

As those who live in harmony with the earth and with the forest know, when you damage mother earth there are consequences. That's not something we make up in our heads: that's a physical and spiritual fact.

So this law is in alignment with those principles, and it protects the rights and habitats of all those beings, including the cultural traditions of West Papuans themselves.

Ecocide is a powerful word. It's a powerful word to describes what's happening to our planet. It literally means 'to kill one's home'. The moment we understand that word we intuitively know it to be both dangerous and morally wrong. This has been deeply recognised in the Green State Vision which is being launched here today. And we warmly support both the right of West Papuans to self-determination, and their own determination to respect and protect the richly biodiverse ecosystems that make up their beautiful home.

That was the speech that I wrote. But I just want to add something. Because the prayer that the Reverend gave at the beginning, and the words of Benny Wenda talking about his homeland, and the positivity, and the offering that their community and their people are making to the world in the context of the oppression that they have suffered is unbelievably inspiring.

I often get asked around ecocide law 'what can ordinary people do?' And I say, Look I'm not an extraordinary person, the same as you. We can switch our lights off more often, or turn off the tap when we brush our teeth. But here is a people that after sixty years of oppression is standing up and saying 'We have solutions for the rest of the world'. And that's incredibly humbling, and incredibly inspiring, and I just feel so honoured to be able to stand here today.

Thank you so much for the inspiration that is coming out of this small, inspiring and yet oceanically huge-hearted and hugely inspiring country.