



RIO TINTO IN WEST PAPUA AND MUMA YOSEFA ALOMANG

Rio Tinto, the British-Australian mining giant, often escapes scrutiny of its business in West Papua (expropriating gold, copper and silver) with its claim that it “holds interests in companies and joint ventures that it does not manage”. The British-Australian mining giant’s “unincorporated joint venture” is a 40% interest in Freeport McMoran’s monstrous Grasberg Mine. In 2014 that meant the revenue from 2.3 thousand ounces of gold and 7.7 thousand tonnes of copper. In 2011, Rio Tinto paid the Indonesian Government \$US 125,000,000 in tax.

Grasberg is an open pit, one mile wide at the surface, that has gouged the Amungme people’s glacier-capped mountain-mother *Nemangkawi*. Beneath the pit, the Amungme’s spiritual heartland is further disembowled at the rate of 50,000 tonnes of ore per day (240,000 tonnes per day after 2017). Mine waste dumped in Lake Wanagon has killed surrounding waters, including the Aikwa River system that ends up in the Arafura Sea. Grasslands and subalpine forest are now barren, with no fish, plants, or birds. Since 1991 the companies have imported fruit and vegetables from Cairns (rather than buying from locals), and appropriated an 850-hectare vegetable garden in Timika to build a hangar, offices, and Sheraton Hotel.

In 2006, the Norwegian Government declared Rio Tinto and Freeport were environmental vandals, and excluded them from its (\$240 billion) Pension Fund investment portfolio. The companies’ health and safety record is equally abysmal. In September 2014, five workers were killed. In May 2013 twenty-eight were killed, which the companies said “would have no material effect on mining and milling operations or development activities.”

Muma Yosefa Alomang and husband Markus Kwalik, whose five children died from tailings sickness, have spent their life fighting the landlessness, poverty, and disease in communities displaced by the mine. She was imprisoned eighteen times between 1977 and 1994—when she was detained for a month in a cargo container of human faeces. In 2001, she won the US Goldman Environmental Prize, and in 1999 the Yap Thiam Hien Human Rights Award (but refused to go to Jakarta for the ceremony). In 2005 she was one of 1,000 women nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

In December 2014, Muma Yosefa participated in the *Reconciliation and Unity Summit for West Papuan Leaders* in Vanuatu, where independence groups elected a ‘united, consultative, representative’ committee (United Liberation Movement for West Papua/ULMWP) to carry the nation’s political agenda in the diaspora. The Summit was initiated by the 2013 World Council of Churches Assembly in Busan, South Korea; propelled by the Protestant Church in West Papua (*Gereja Kristen Injili*) and Lutheran Church in PNG; sponsored by the Vanuatu Government; and moderated by the Malvatumauri National Council of Chiefs, Vanuatu Christian Council, and Pacific Conference of Churches. A month later, on 4 February 2015, the Vanuatu Government lodged the ULMWP application to join the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG).

On 26 June 2015, the MSG leaders—from Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Kanaky (New Caledonia), Papua New Guinea, and Fiji—accepted West Papua’s application and granted the nation diplomatic standing and observer status. A few weeks later, on 11 September, the eighteen-member Pacific Islands Forum also accepted West Papua’s application to join and agreed to send a fact-finding mission to Jayapura.

Photo 1—Muma Josefa Alomang with Vanuatu Prime Minister Joe Natuman, *Reconciliation and Unity Summit for West Papuan Leaders* Vanuatu, 6 Dec 2014 (Photo—Tommy Latupeirissa)

Photo 2—Mum Yosefa being arrested in Jayapura, along with 47 other West Papuans, during Melanesian Spearhead Group fact-finding mission on 16 February 2014

Photo 3—1971: North wall of Mt Jaya massif from subalpine forest above Lake Discovery (Photo—Richard Muggleton 1971)

Photo 4—2000: Rio Tinto and Freeport: gouging the Amungme mother Nemankawii

Compiled by Louise Byrne in 2015 for West Papua Women’s Office
Federal Republic of West Papua, Suite 211, 838 Collins St, Docklands
frwpwomensoffice@gmail.com; www.dfait.federalrepublicofwestpapua.org