

Women reject mining in West Manggarai

Dozens of women who are part of the West Manggarai Independent Women's Alliance (APIR) in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) staged a rally on Monday, urging West Manggarai regent Agustinus C. Dula to revoke every license for geothermal and mineral ore mining in the regency and to issue no more new licenses. APIR chairperson Lusia Sut urged Agustinus to remain strong despite a court decision ruling in favor of mining investors.

"We joined the peaceful rally by wearing songket [intricate woven fabric] and kebaya [long-sleeved blouses] as a symbol of resistance by the womenfolk against mining activities in West Manggarai in particular, and Flores Island in general," Lusia said in a rally in Labuan Bajo municipality on Monday. APIR also urged the regency administration not to disburse any funds from the West Manggarai regency budget to compensate the investors according to the court ruling, because the regency budget is not meant for enriching mining investors.

APIR also deemed the regency administration should be more transparent in conveying information on mining, and its impacts, through the media. She added law enforcement officers should work professionally, based on conscience, and should not succumb to pressure, accept bribes, or compromise justice and truth. They should also uphold the law for social justice and for a sustainable way of living. She added that members of women's groups and various people concerned with the environment in West Manggarai were concerned and anxious about the issue.

"We are aware that allowing mining is the same as destroying the environment, polluting water and air and threatening people's lives. The message from our ancestors, which is still close to our hearts, is that land will not expand but could diminish due to disasters and human behavior, while humans and the future generations will multiply and breed. That's why we firmly oppose mining," she emphasized. APIR activist Mersiana Karmin told the crowd that Lembata and Flores Island, and NTT in general, are regarded as small islands in which administrations must abide by Law No. 27/2007 on coastal areas and small island management.

Besides that, Flores Island and NTT are part of an archipelago which is prone to natural disasters, as they are located in the so-called Ring of Fire. Furthermore, Mersiana added that West Manggarai is inhabited by 215,545 people, consisting of 107,383 men and 107,707 women, who depend on the agriculture, livestock, fishery and tourism sectors as their source of income. Mersiana said West Manggarai, especially regency capital Labuan Bajo and its surrounding areas, are one of the world's main tourist destinations due to their natural and cultural wealth.

"People, generally, can only live in an ecology which is healthy," said Mersiana.

When the protesters arrived at the West Manggarai legislative office, council members were not on hand to meet them, so they were greeted by the council's financial secretary Aurelia Imelda. Imelda said she would convey the women's aspiration to councilors. At the West Manggarai Police precinct, the protesters were greeted by operations division chief Adj. Comr. Tobias Tamonob. Tobias said police had received the message from the public and would convey it to the West Manggarai Police chief.

The protesters then marched to the Labuan Bajo District Court to convey their objective there.