



“Land is Our Life”: *Laudato Si*’ in Action in Papua New Guinea

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Introduction

Papua New Guinea (PNG), situated in Oceania in the Western Pacific north of Australia, is home to some twelve million people, the majority (over 95 percent) being members of indigenous ethnic groups.¹ The first human inhabitants are thought to have come from Southeast Asia some 50,000 years ago, with successive migrations out of Southeast Asia since then. Papua New Guinea is one of the most culturally rich countries in the world, with over 800 distinct languages, each representing a cultural group.² Ethnicity follows these cultural groupings.³

In the nineteenth century, the territory known as Papua came under the colonial power of Britain, and the territory known as New Guinea under the colonial power of Germany. After the First World War, both territories came under the colonial administration of Australia until they united as Papua New Guinea gained independence in 1975. Today PNG is a constitutional monarchy within the British Commonwealth,

¹ PNG has not become a settler state and practically all people with land rights in PNG are indigenous people. Hence, indigenous ethnic groups, though often small, form a majority of the population in PNG. Their ancestors have lived there for perhaps thousands of years so land rights normally rely on links traced to ancestors. We will use the term “local” people to refer to people having hereditary rights to a particular area of land.

² Today English has become the principal language of education, administration and commerce. Melanesian Pidgin (Tok Pisin) has developed naturally as the dominant lingua franca, often used for communication between members of different ethnic groups.

³ Indigenous peoples of Oceania are divided culturally into three groupings: Polynesia, Micronesia and Melanesia. People in Papua New Guinea (together with Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, indigenous people or New Caledonia and the iTaukei of Fiji) are mostly Melanesian (Melanesia etymologically means “islands of black [people]).”

with a 111-member unicameral national parliament elected for five years by universal suffrage. PNG politics is business. Over USD300 million each year is distributed in District and Provincial Services Improvement Programs controlled by politicians or political appointees. Corruption and the culture of exploiting public office for personal gain seems to have become entrenched and Transparency International ranks PNG at 127/180 on the corruption perceptions index, putting PNG in the company of Peru and Djibouti.⁴

With substantial mineral and gas deposits, plentiful forests and bountiful tropical waters, PNG could be a rapidly developing country. However, in economic terms, the nation has made little progress since independence.⁵ There has been a steady decline in infrastructure and services in recent years, particularly in rural areas. Poverty remains a contested concept in PNG. The abject poverty seen in many parts of the world is largely absent from PNG, or at least hidden by subsistence food production which also masks the high levels of malnutrition and stunting prevalent in rural PNG. Papua New Guinea's social and human indicators remain those of a poor low-income country, according to economist Paul Barker from the Institute of National Affairs.⁶ PNG has so far met only one of the Sustainable Development Goals.⁷

Evangelisation by German and French Missionaries began in the coastal areas in the nineteenth century.⁸ In the year 2000 census, 96 percent of the people are identified as Christian.⁹ The Catholic Church, with nineteen dioceses, is the largest Christian denomination in the country. This paper offers a case study of the mission of a Catholic Diocese in PNG working with local people to bring about unity and justice over land development in a part of East New Britain Province known as Pomio.¹⁰ The Church response was based on the principles of Catholic Social teaching and the letter of Pope Francis, *Laudato Si' (LS)*, on the Care of Our Common Home.

⁴ Transparency International, Corruption Perceptions Index 2024. <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2024>

⁵ On the United Nations Human Development Index 2023, PNG ranks 154/193, just above Timor-Leste, Solomon Islands, and Uganda. <https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/global-report-document/hdr2023-24reporten.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.thenational.com.pg/png-lags-in-socio-development-indicators-says-barker/>.

⁷ Goal 12 - Responsible Consumption and Production. <https://dashboards.sdgindex.org/profiles/papua-new-guinea>

⁸ Early German missionaries were from the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (MSC) and Society of the Divine Word (SVD) and Sister Servants of the Holy Spirit (SSpS). Early French missionaries were from the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart and from the Society of Mary (SM).

⁹ The year 2000 census, which is the most reliable to date records the Catholic Church with 27% of the population, Lutheran 19%, United (Methodist) 11%, Seventh Day Adventists 10%, and Anglican 3%. Pentecostal churches are growing rapidly. Philip Gibbs, *Bountiful Harvest, the Churches in Papua New Guinea*. Occasional Paper 13, Melanesian Institute, Goroka, PNG (2007) pp. 33ff.

¹⁰ The Pomio District is one of the four administrative districts that make up the East New Britain Province in PNG. It covers an area of 11,000km² with a population of some 75,000 people, almost all being indigenous people. The principal local languages in the district are Mamusi, Mengen, and Lote.

Special Agricultural Business Lease (SABL)

It is often asserted that 97 percent of PNG's total land area remains under customary ownership¹¹ of the local indigenous people just as it was when PNG gained its independence from Australian colonial rule in 1975.¹² This is no longer true.¹³ The PNG Land Act (1996) contains provisions that enable the state to lease land from customary landowners and then lease it back to other persons or organizations. In the eight years from 2003 to 2010, almost ten percent of PNG's total land area was alienated from its customary owners and transferred to private companies through this lease-leaseback scheme. The leases came to be known as Special Agricultural Business Leases (SABL) and in that way, more than 5 million hectares of customary land have been alienated in over seventy leases to landowner companies associated with some rather dubious 'development partners', most of whom appear to be logging companies.

Landowners had been encouraged by the government to enter into the scheme. John Parulrea, former chairman of the landowner company Memalo Holdings of Pomio wrote as follows:

It was decided that it was appropriate to get outside companies to become involved in commercial operations in the area to stimulate the economy and promote infrastructure development.... The means of achieving this was through the Special Agricultural Business Lease which was being promoted by the National and Provincial Governments. Through this customary land would be given to the Government. This would then be converted to State lease. This was then returned to the customary landowners who could then sub lease it to a company.¹⁴

Landowners had not been aware that serious questions were being raised about corruption and exploitation associated with the scheme, and a Commission of Inquiry was set up in July 2011. The Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea, Hon. Peter O'Neil, on presenting the Commission of Inquiry's reports to Parliament in September 2013, said that these reports revealed a shocking trend of mismanagement and corruption and changes were necessary. He also stated: "We will no longer watch on as foreign owned companies come in and con

¹¹ There are two principal types of land rights in PNG. Customary land rights, sometimes referred to as proprietary rights, give the proprietor or landowner the right to decide who will occupy or use the land, for what period of time and for what purpose. User's rights, on the other hand, are those rights obtained through occupation and use of land granted by a proprietor. Customary land rights are acquired principally through inheritance or by marriage. Customary land is held in common but production is largely dependent upon individual effort, particularly that of women.

¹² PNG is yet to ratify the ILO Convention on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries 1989 and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

¹³ Filer, C, The New Land Grab in Papua New Guinea, *Pacific studies* 34(2/3):269-294.

¹⁴ Affidavit of John Parulrea, Catholic Archdiocese of Rabaul. The Sigite-Mukus Agreement Submissions Regarding the Unfairness of the Current Sub-lease agreements between Gilford Ltd and the four land owning Companies: Pomata Investment Ltd, Rolopal Investment Ltd, Nakiura Investment Ltd, Unung Sigite Ltd.

our landowners, chop down our forests and then take the proceeds offshore ... For too long landowners have been taken advantage of and had their land stolen from under them.”¹⁵ Despite the protest of the Prime Minister, the SABLs continued.

Spirituality of Land and Identity

SABLs that require local people to lease their land to the State with the intention of attracting commercial development can run the risk of offending against traditional attitudes to land of the indigenous people. The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples has stressed how indigenous people have a strong link to territories and surrounding natural resources, have distinct social, economic or political systems; and a distinct language, culture and beliefs.¹⁶ The people of Pomio, who are the focus of this paper, continue to maintain their identity with strong intimate links to their inherited natural resources. Above all, land is their home, their mother.¹⁷ Myths and stories contribute to the importance of geographical features. Sacred sites in Pomio are regarded as where the world began and also where it will end; so many are worried by the destruction of these sites. People tell of the mythical Nutu brothers, one big and one small, whose rivalry brings about conflict and belief in the rebirth of the world a second time. Centre of the conflict, a place called Marana near the Palmalmal airfield, is a sacred place where it is believed the world will re-begin. Accordingly, there was much concern and anger when logging by Rimbunan Hijau started at Marana.¹⁸

¹⁵ O'Neill, Peter, "Statement by the Prime Minister Hon. Peter O'Neill CMG MP on the Report on the Commission of Inquiry into Special Agriculture and Business Leases", 2013. <https://act-nowpng.org/sites/default/files/PM%20Statement%20COI%20SABL%20Final%20Report.pdf>.

¹⁶ United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, "Indigenous Peoples and the United Nations Human Rights System. <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/fs9Rev.2.pdf>

¹⁷ "Our biological mother gives birth to us, she buries our umbilical cord into our mother land. When growing up we continue to drink from the milk which is water that comes from the breast from our mythological mother, the land. When we die our body goes back to our mother "the land" and our spirit goes back to the spirit of the land (the creator)." (Co-author Matthias Lopa, Pomio). Matthias Lopa adds, "The Asian industrial revolution rapes our mother and leaves us her children abandoned. Our step-father the Asians have no cultural, social, political and social connection with us."

¹⁸ Personal communication anthropologist Andrew Lattas with Philip Gibbs, 26th December, 2018. In the myth, one brother "Bigpela Nutu" does everything first but haphazardly or incorrectly whilst the other smaller brother "Liklik Nutu" does everything a second time and properly. For this reason these stories feature in millenarian beliefs about the world being remade a second time, only this time properly. Liklik Nutu had an affair with the wife of Bigpela Nutu, after which he drew designs on her stomach. When Bigpela Nutu found this out he chased away Liklik Nutu who absconded overseas from where he will return. Some say he went to the land of whites where he was called Jesus. Another story tells of the significance of the river Nanas. It concerns God creating not Adam and Eve but two men. The older one places volcanic glass into the trunk of a betel nut tree and then tricks the younger brother into climbing the tree and then sliding down fast whereupon he is castrated and becomes the first woman - his wife. This happened at a river called Nanasa - the word also means incest. Some of the blood from the castration event splattered the moon and created the menstrual cycle.

Most local people in PNG see land as an integral part of their lives. They relate to the land both physically and spiritually. Land gives local people a sense of identity and belonging. Mountains, rivers, and lakes are part of people's history. Each clan knows where their ancestors are buried and will identify with certain features of the landscape such as mountains and rivers and these features are important for inter-clan relations particularly on occasions involving marriage or funerals. Someone will be identified not by name but as a person from that river or that mountain. Spiritually people identify with the land as part of their history and identity. In the mythic past, their ancestors who were buried on their land provided villagers with their songs, masks, dances, magical spells, clans, and certain species of taro, bananas, and pigs.¹⁹

Matthias Lopa from Pomio summarized, "If we give our land away, or if someone has taken it through commercial means, then we come to realise that our life is taken away and our sense of connectedness is disturbed because land is our life. The graves of our ancestors give us a sense of belonging. If that land is taken away for 99 years, then we become nobody."

Injustice to Vulnerable People

The development for this study is known as the The Sigite Mukus Oil Palm Project. It was undertaken by Gilford Ltd, a wholly owned subsidiary of the Malaysian logging company Rimbunan Hijau, involving 55,400 acres of land, which is situated in the West Pomio district of the East New Britain Province. The people of West Pomio are a vulnerable people following a semi-subsistence lifestyle relying totally on their land for food and housing materials. They are relatively isolated, and most adults are illiterate. They have not been given sufficient attention by the government and their institutions are inadequately financed and managed. They are dependent on their land to extract a living for themselves and their families. From the appeal of the people, it appears that they had been adversely affected by the Sigite Mukus Project. The sub-lease agreement appears to be unjust in the way it was set up and the way it was being implemented. The chairman and directors of the different landowning companies had no part in the draft of the agreements. The people were also aware that some of their fellow clan members had been persuaded by different means to support the work of the company. Also of significance is the awareness that the company had police stationed in the logging camps. The company was providing accommodation and transport for the police. From the perspective of the people, the police would support the company. When they were in this vulnerable position and were pressured to sign an agreement, then it was highly likely that they would succumb to the pressure.

¹⁹ Particularly important in the Pomio area is the place of the dead in the Kivung movement which arose in the 1960s and still has influence today. Through that millenarian movement dead ancestors who dwell in the alternative world of the underground assumed new importance as mediators of sovereignty, civilization, and development. Andrew Lattas, "The Utopian Promise of Government," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 12, no. 1 (Mar. 2006): 129-150.

According to Matthias Lopa, “It is not a development but a foreign invasion and exploitation of our indigenality.”

Aware the company was exploiting the vulnerability of the indigenous people, the Catholic Archdiocese of Rabaul tried to intervene on their behalf.

When the representatives of Gilford came we expressed our concern about the fact that this was a Special Agricultural Business Lease rather than a logging agreement. We said that we needed to take it to West Pomio and discuss it with the people. We were told clearly by the Gilford representatives that if we didn’t sign immediately the project work would not proceed and they would look elsewhere for a local project partner.²⁰

Since then there is general dissatisfaction among the people about the project.

The project has been in operation for five years. However we have received no benefits or services. Now the people are annoyed at us [community leaders]. They are questioning why they are not receiving the benefits that we were promised.²¹

The dissatisfaction can be summarised under the following five points:

- The inadequacy of the rental payment of PNG kina1.50 (USD0.50) per acre per year.²²
- Loss of land. The sublease agreement made no provision for adequate land for food gardens and conservation and sacred sites such as graves and some caves with ancient drawings.
- Damage done to the environment, for example, spraying from the oil palm was polluting rivers that supplied water and food for the villagers, and clearing of land removed the protection that the trees and vegetation provided in times of heavy rain and flooding.

²⁰ Affidavit of David Olpua, clause 11. Catholic Archdiocese of Rabaul. The Sigite-Mukus Agreement Submissions regarding the unfairness of the current sub-lease agreements between Gilford Ltd and the four land owning companies.

²¹ Affidavit of Paul Manus, last clause. Catholic Archdiocese of Rabaul. The Sigite-Mukus Agreement. Submissions, p. 28.

²² It is estimated that the company has felled and exported logs worth at least K313 (USD96 million). This figure does not take into account the value of some species such as teak. The company is supposed to pay the landowners K10 (USD3.00) per cubic metre, which is based on the figures of felled and exported logs would amount to K12 million (USD3.7 million). It is unclear to the people who has received this and how much they have received. Archbishop Francesco Panfilo, “Singkai Lecture” July 7, 2019. <https://pomio catholic community.home.blog/2019/07/07/advocacy-for-the-people-of-pomio-implementing-laudato-si-the-singkai-lecture/>

- The project provided employment for up to 4,000 people, but under very poor conditions and at wages below the minimum wage of K3.36 per hour (USD1.00 per hour).
- The fact was that there had not been the infrastructure development in the area that people were led to believe would occur as a result of the project.

Engagement of the Archdiocese in Peoples' Concerns

Logging by Gilford Ltd, a subsidiary of Rimbunan Hijau logging corporation had commenced in 2010 and by 2012 there was already tension in the West Pomio communities. During his visits to communities of the Pomio Deanery, individuals and groups of people asked Archbishop Francesco Panfilo to speak up for them as they felt powerless. Archbishop Panfilo related how people were asking him to “be a voice for the voiceless.” They had entered into an agreement with Gilford Ltd, a subsidiary of the international Malaysian company but were experiencing difficulties communicating with the company. People expressed to the archbishop their dissatisfaction, as outlined in the previous section.

Some community leaders were asking about a new lease agreement recommended by the Government Commission of Enquiry. The lawyer for the logging company pointed out that the sub-lease agreement should be respected as a legal document. The archbishop acknowledged that it was legal but questioned whether it was just and fair. The archbishop thought that developing a new lease agreement could be a way of bringing the divided community together. “It could build up unity in the community, and as Bishop that is my mission,” said Bishop Panfilo.²³ In June 2014, the diocese welcomed volunteer administrator Mr Doug Tennent, a New Zealander with many years of experience in PNG, including teaching law at the University of PNG. The archbishop was happy to have Mr Tennant active in the renegotiation of the agreement.

Care of Our Common Home

The basis of the archdiocese’ engagement in people’s concerns is not just because the majority of the people living in the Pomio area are Catholic. The work of promoting peace and social justice is also a central part of the social teachings of the church. It is biblically based and responds to the call of Pope Francis to care for our common home (Cf. *Laudato Si’*).

Two months after *Laudato Si’* was published in June 2015, Archbishop Panfilo wrote a six-page pastoral letter responding in practical ways to what the Pope had written, especially chapter five of *Laudato Si’*. The archbishop notes how the heart of the

²³ Archbishop Panfilo. Personal Communication with Philip Gibbs, Vunapope, 1 September 2018.

Pope's reflections is the point that the people have to sit together at the negotiating table. But that didn't happen in Pomio. The archbishop recalled how the Pope asks, "What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?" The Pope further adds, "We need to ask ourselves other pointed questions: "What is the purpose of our life in this world? Why are we here? What is the goal of our work and all our efforts? What need does the earth have of us?" (*LS* 160). He notes the answer lies in profound changes to political, economic, cultural, and social systems, as well as to our individual lifestyles (*LS* 5,23).

Pope Francis wanted to impress on everybody that "integral ecology," is not only care of the natural world, but it also implies justice for the poorest and most vulnerable people. Only by radically reshaping our relationships with God, with our neighbours, and with the natural world, he said, can we hope to tackle the threats facing our planet today. There is an inseparable bond "between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace" (*LS* 10). The archbishop recalled how in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (*EG*), Pope Francis wrote: "I want a Church which is poor and for the poor ... We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them" (*EG* 198). The pope also asks how can we as Church, in very practical ways, care for our common home and be a Church that is poor and for the poor?

The archbishop concludes:

Trusting in God's love and providence and in the cooperation of believers, the Archdiocese of Rabaul is committed to the following:

1. Disposing of the land, especially of large plantations;
2. Starting a housing project for low-income earners;
3. Helping achieve a broad consensus in the Sigite Mukus Palm Oil Project in West Pomio.²⁴

This paper focuses on the third point.

Divide and Rule versus Unite to Serve

On 31 May 2016, Mr. Doug Tennent and the Archbishop flew to Port Moresby for a meeting with a delegation of the parent company Rimbunan Hijau. The meeting seemed to go well and it appeared that the company was open to re-negotiate a new lease agreement. However, this did not happen; time was passing, and the six-year statute of limitations period was almost over. After the elapse of the six-year period, no one would be able to bring the company to court over the agreement. So,

²⁴ Archbishop Francesco Panfilo, Pastoral Letter 7, 15 August 2017, Archdiocese of Rabaul, 2.

encouraged by the archbishop, the landowners proceeded to file legal action to obtain a court order for mediation between the local people and the company.

The company was not happy with this move and developed a plan to discredit Doug Tennent and the archbishop. On Friday, 9 June 2017, two officers from the Office of the Immigration and Citizenship Service Authority flew from Port Moresby to the archdiocese headquarters at Vunapope to serve Mr Tennent with a “Notice of Cancellation of Entry Permit” and “Direction as to Custody and Removal Order”, which were signed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Immigration. After two days of challenging the order, the officers came with the police and forcibly took Doug Tennent to Port Moresby. The archdiocese took out an injunction restraining Mr Tennent from going on any flight out of the country. However, this was ignored, and he was deported to New Zealand. There was widespread concern in the media with much criticism of Rimbunan Hijau. The archbishop appealed, “Any ordinary person knows that orders of this kind cannot be given unless there are powerful and wealthy institutions and personalities behind. For the sake of the ordinary and innocent people of PNG, we ask the Government to come clear once and for all.”²⁵

The Friday 16 June 2017 edition of *The National* newspaper (owned by Rimbunan Hijau) published an article entitled “Pomio Project Defended”. There were some landowners who came forward and declared that they were not the ones who lodged the complaint against Mr Doug Tennent. One wonders why these landowners had to be flown all the way to Port Moresby by the company to deny something they claim they did not do.

At the Port Moresby press conference, it was claimed that the archbishop and Mr Tennent continued to “propagate divisions among the landowners and landowner company directors.” The archbishop and Mr Tennant were accused “of deceit,” because they “are not advocating for the landowners,” but rather “they are out to permanently stop the desires and aspirations for development” of the landowners.²⁶

The archbishop responded that the strategy of “divide people in order to rule” is commonly practiced by greedy and powerful economic groups who want to enrich themselves at all costs. The strategy of the Church, however, was to “unite people in order to serve” the common good of all. He continued, “For this reason I appeal to everyone to put aside personal interests and think about the good of all, especially of our children. What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us?²⁷ The Church does not have any other interest than “to encourage an honest and open debate so that particular interests or ideologies will not prejudice the common good” (LS 188).²⁸

²⁵ Archbishop Francesco Panfilo, The Deportation of Mr Douglas Tennent, statement circulated by email. 12 June 2017.

²⁶ The National, June 16, 2017, 2, “Pomio project Defended,”. Doug Tennent was deported allegedly “due to the blatant abuse of the conditions of his Religious Worker visa, by engaging in sensitive landowners issues.” He spent two months in NZ before being permitted to return to Papua New Guinea.

²⁷ Archbishop Francesco Panfilo, “Singkai Lecture”

²⁸ Archbishop Francesco Panfilo, Pastoral Letter 7, 15 August 2017, Archdiocese of Rabaul.

Archbishop Panfillo recalled his response to *Laudato Si'* and the situation of the local people in his diocese as follows:

Can a Bishop look the other way? Can a Religious Worker pretend that these injustices are not happening? To advocate for the vulnerable and powerless, which is the situation of the people of West Pomio, is a Gospel mandate, just as it is to educate the young and care for sick people. It is the duty of every religious worker and of every Christian for that matter, to give effect to the teachings of Christ in word and action. One wonders why those who expose these evil and unjust practices should be deported, while those who commit them are not!²⁹

Second Rate Citizen or Dialogue Partner

The main intention of the Church's efforts was not to take the company to court, but rather to bring them to mediation so that the local people could have a "place at the table" (LS 183) and could discuss issues that concerned them with the company. From 26-27 March 2018, a mediation was conducted at Kokopo to address the issues relating to the Sigite Mukus Oil Palm Project in West Pomio. The mediation was conducted by an external accredited mediator from Australia. As a result of the mediation, the company agreed to renegotiate the sublease agreement. It was up to the landowner groups to develop a new agreement that they considered fair and submit this to the company. A second mediation took place in March 2019. This was also unsuccessful so in 2021 the landowners took the case to court, but the case was dismissed. The landowners appealed in 2024, but the appeal was unsuccessful.

The mediated arrangement was meant to open the door to effectively address the issues and tensions that relate to any development project that concerned the livelihood of 79,000 West Pomio people, allowing both parties to negotiate on equal terms and enabling the landowners to take the lead in proposing the terms and conditions of the new agreements based on equity, justice and sustainability, and with an emphasis on the need for environment awareness and protection. But that has not happened. In 2024 a representative of the landowners wrote in a media statement, "The developer does not respect us or acknowledge us as partners in development. When we go to talk, they do not see us. When we write to them, they do not reply. They feel no obligation to provide us with information. We are seen as second-rate citizens, even though this is our land and our heritage."³⁰

In PNG, Indigenous people form the majority, yet ethnic groups can feel discriminated against when confronted by the actions of an international logging company that is supported by their own government and the police. The local people in various parts of the country find themselves in an unjust situation, which they feel powerless to

²⁹ Archbishop Francesco Panfilo, Presentation of Archbishop Panfilo at round table meeting, Palmalal, 21st June 2017. Unpublished document, Archdiocese of Rabaul.

³⁰ Media statement 2024 by Douglas Tennent. Personal Communication 19 July 2025.

change. In this case study, the local West Pomio people felt that the sublease agreement for the Sigite Mukus oil palm project appeared to be unjust in the way it was set up and the way it was implemented. Even some of their fellow clan members had been persuaded by various means to support the logging company's work.

Land is essential to the social, cultural, and spiritual development of Indigenous people and for them to uphold their identity and sense of belonging. People do not only own the land, but it is an integral part of their lives. Indigenous peoples must be recognised as resources in learning how to relate with nature more sustainably. Pope Francis recognised this when in *Laudato Si'*, on the issue of environmental sustainability, he invited everyone to recognise Indigenous peoples as our principal dialogue partners.

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