

URGENT ACTION

FISHERMEN ON TRIAL AFTER PROTESTING ENCROACHMENT

Ilham Mahmudi and Taufik, two fishermen from North Sumatra Province, face trial amid efforts to save their coastal village from drowning. They face up to five and a half years in prison after being indicted for alleged group violence and property damage. Local NGOs and advocates view the charges as a form of unjust criminalization linked to their activities as environmental activists. They, along with their community, strive to protect the mangrove forest in the area from encroachment, which they fear could lead to flooding and cause their village to sink. The Indonesian authorities must ensure a fair and impartial prosecution and grant their right to a fair trial.

TAKE ACTION:

- Write a letter in your own words or using the sample below as a guide to one or both government officials listed. You can also email, fax, call or Tweet them.
- [Click here](#) to let us know the actions you took on **Urgent Action 68.24**. It's important to report because we share the total number with the officials we are trying to persuade and the people we are trying to help.

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Dear Prosecutor, or Dear Deputy Chief of Mission

I am writing to express my concern for **Ilham Mahmudi** and **Taufik**, two fishermen from Kwala Langkat Village who currently stand trial after their efforts to save their coastal village from drowning. Together with the locals, the two fishermen have been vocal in protesting the encroachment of a protected mangrove forest in their village by a private entity, fearing that it would lead to coastal erosion that endangers the village's existence.

On July 15, 2024, the prosecutors indicted Ilham and Taufik for allegedly participating in group violence and property damage during a protest on March 21, 2024, which involved the damaging of a makeshift hut in the forest. They were put on trial following weeks of pre-trial detention after they were arrested separately on April 18 and May 11, 2024, respectively. Both were arrested without warrants by plainclothes police officers and they were not accompanied by legal counsel during their first interrogation. While Taufik has been released from pre-trial detention since July 4, Ilham remains in the prosecutor's office detention. They risk up to five and a half years in prison.

Therefore, I urge you to ensure that Ilham and Taufik's fair trial rights are guaranteed in accordance with international standards. I also urge you to ensure that Ilham has regular, unrestricted access to a lawyer of his choice and is provided access to healthcare and medical treatment if he requires it. Finally, I ask the authorities to ensure that all human rights defenders and their families, including Kwala Langkat community, can carry out their protests peacefully without fear.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

In 2014, residents of Kwala Langkat Village, Langkat Regency, North Sumatra Province, started to rehabilitate mangrove trees in the area, given that mangrove ecosystem is crucial to support their livelihoods, as majority of the villagers work as fishermen. However, in the years that follow, the conservation work was constrained by the encroachment from palm oil operations in the area. The damages in mangrove ecosystem have affected the work of local fishermen, who now need to sail further into the sea to get to their catchment area and have also caused tidal flooding into their village. The villagers grew concerned over further erosion, given that the neighboring Tapak Kuda Village has been submerged due to rising sea level.

In January 2024, a swath of the mangrove forest was further encroached for palm oil operations, drawing protests from the villagers who later reported the encroachment to the North Sumatra Regional Police. Upon receiving the report, police officers visited the forest and confiscated an excavator on February 6, 2024 but took no further actions to investigate the encroachment activities. Due to frustration with the police's inaction, some local residents demolished a hut in the mangrove forest that had been used by the excavator operators to rest in.

On March 22, 2024, Ilham Mahmudi was reported to the police for his alleged involvement in the demolition of a makeshift wooden hut. On April 18, 2024, police officers in plain clothes came to his house and arrested Ilham without a warrant. He was not accompanied by a legal counsel during his first interrogation and later was forced to be represented by a lawyer chosen by the police.

Taufik was initially arrested along with another fisherman, Safii, on May 11, 2024, and were accused of alleged involvement in damaging the house on April 18. They were arrested by the police while fishing for shellfish in a boat on the sea. Plainclothes police officers came with a speedboat and arrested the two without warrants and threatened to shoot them if they refused to follow. They were also not accompanied by a legal counsel during their first interrogation on May 11.

While in police custody, Taufik was also investigated for his alleged involvement in the demolition of the makeshift hut in the forest and later named suspect in the case. On July 4, 2024, Taufik and Safii's charges in the April 18 case were dropped and the proceedings were terminated after they signed a settlement letter with the house owner, leading to Safii's release. On the same day, Ilham and Taufik's trial was set to start, but was postponed as their lawyer was sick. However, on that day, the judges ordered the release of Taufik from pre-trial detention, while Ilham remains in the Langkat Prosecutor's Office detention since his transfer from police custody on June 14, 2024.

Indonesia has committed to ensuring environmental sustainability and achieving net-zero emissions "[by 2060 or sooner](#)" as part of efforts in tackling the climate crisis. However, between January 2019 and June 2024, Amnesty International recorded at least 18 cases of arrests, attacks, and intimidation of environmental activists who defended their rights to land and a healthy environment.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Bahasa Indonesia, English, or your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: October 17, 2024

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Ilham Mahmudi, Taufik (he/him/them)