

Monika Maritjie Kailey

Women and Youth of the Aru Islands Protecting Biodiversity



Monika Maritjie Kailey, commonly known as Monik, is a female indigenous advocate from the Aru Islands, Maluku, Indonesia. She was born in the remote village of Fatlabata on Koba Island, known for its seaweed, fish, salted fish, and mangrove crabs



The Aru Islands are located in eastern Indonesia, specifically in Maluku Province. This region comprises **832 small islands** with **a total land area 800,000 hectares**.

Since becoming a university student in 2013, Monik and other students from Aru in Yogyakarta (Java) have voiced the **#SaveAru** movement

The **#SaveAru** movement is a form of resistance by the Aru people against plans to destroy the forest and seize indigenous lands in the small Aru Islands

Monik will attend and participate in the Conference of the Parties (CoP) of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), to be held from October 21-31 in Cali, Colombia.



She carries a message from the indigenous people of the Aru Islands that for centuries, it has been the indigenous communities who have protected the forests, seas, and the rich biodiversity within them. **She calls for the protection of indigenous peoples' rights to manage their territories and biodiversity, especially for her homeland in the Aru Islands.**

in the Aru Islands, there are **156,000 hectares of mangroves, 550,000 hectares of lowland forests, and 22,000 hectares of savannah.** The surrounding seas cover 4 million hectares

In the Aru Sea, there are **53,000 hectares of coral reefs** and **19,000 hectares of seagrass beds.** The Aru Sea also contributes 21% of the national fisheries potential, with an estimated **value of 771,600 tons per year**

From a young age, Monik was taught responsibility, especially as the eldest daughter of six siblings.

At 6-8 years old, she often accompanied her father into the forest to search for bird nests, track and hunt animals, and learn how to set crab traps and plant sago trees, marking ownership of the forest.

These experiences instilled ethics and knowledge about her living space, as well as a deep awareness of the importance of preserving nature in the life of indigenous people in Fatlabata, Aru Islands.

In various traditional rituals, they are taught that the land is "**jina tubir**" (Aru language), meaning "**mother's womb**," which must be protected. The forest, sea, and everything in them, including plants and animals, form an inseparable part of the lives of the Aru community.



Monik grew up surrounded by the abundance of natural resources, safeguarded by her ancestors and parents, and she continues this legacy as an indigenous female advocate.

Since becoming a university student in 2013, Monik and other students from Aru in Yogyakarta (Java) have voiced the **#SaveAru** movement.

The #SaveAru movement is a form of resistance by the Aru people against plans to destroy the forest and seize indigenous lands in the small Aru Islands.

This movement was born from the shared awareness of the Aru peoples **to protect their living space from the threats of extractive industries and land-grabbing.**



The biodiversity of the Aru Islands has long been under threat from deforestation and environmental degradation. In the 1990s, illegal logging and fishing devastated the indigenous Aru people. In 2012, plans emerged for the development of sugarcane, oil palm, and rubber plantations by the Aru Manise Group over 350,000 hectares. In the same year, another group (Nusa Ina Group) targeted 549,000 hectares of Aru forest for sugarcane, oil palm, and sago plantations.

The forests in Aru, which became contested by large groups, were ultimately obtained by the Menara Group consortium in 2013. Menara Group received a principal permit to release 480,000 hectares of forest from the Ministry of Forestry for sugarcane plantation development. Additionally, in 2017, there was a plan to build a 61,000-hectare cattle ranch

In 2022, there was an attempt to seize the rights of indigenous communities through a carbon trading scheme by corporations, targeting over 500,000 hectares of forest and mangroves. Cases of illegal logging also surged again from 2019. However, the plans for the destruction of natural resources and the seizure of indigenous rights have consistently been thwarted by the indigenous communities of the Aru Islands. Despite this, support and recognition for the Aru indigenous people in their efforts to protect their natural resources remain very limited



In 2019, Monik and the community initiated the **#SaveMarfenfen** movement, part of the **#SaveAru** campaign. Through **#SaveMarfenfen**, Monik and the community fought for the indigenous land of Marafenfen, which had been seized by state military activities. She organized the community to protest and held cultural performances to raise awareness among the Aru people about the importance of protecting indigenous lands.



Monik is currently pursuing her Master's degree at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology. Previously, she worked as a teacher in the Aru Islands. Monik believes that education is key to spreading awareness about the importance of preserving one's homeland and nature to future generations. She hopes to apply the knowledge she gains to develop her region in the future.

Monik will attend and participate in the Conference of the Parties (CoP) of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), to be held from October 21-31 in Cali, Colombia. She carries a message from the indigenous people of the Aru Islands that for centuries, it has been the indigenous communities who have protected the forests, seas, and the rich biodiversity within them. She calls for the protection of indigenous peoples' rights to manage their territories and biodiversity, especially for her homeland in the Aru Islands.

