

MEDIA ALERT

MAY 2009

Our Futures, Our Lands: Melanesian Land Photographic Exhibition

On the 18th of June, AID/WATCH will host a photographic exhibition highlighting the importance of land to Melanesian peoples in Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu.

In Vanuatu 98% of land is held under customary systems of land rights and management. Customary land supports the livelihoods of around 80% of the population in Papua New Guinea.

AID/WATCH Director, Lara Daley said that “Through a land debate dominated by western land experts and a \$54 million AusAID Pacific Land Program Australia threatens to undermine customary systems by pursuing a development agenda which privileges foreign investment interests in the region.”

“In Vanuatu 90% of coastal Efate has already been leased out to expatriates, many of them Australian, marginalizing local populations and at times preventing vital access to the sea. Communities also face difficulties regaining control of the land when lease terms expire” Ms. Daley commented.

“Land in Melanesia is the basis of social cohesion, food security and ecological management. It is a system based on custodianship which is not easily compatible with western notions of land ownership” said Ms. Daley.

The event will feature speakers and a photographic auction in support of collaborations with groups in Melanesia fighting for control over the future of their land.

“Our hope is that this exhibition will raise community awareness around land rights in our region and support for Melanesian peoples determining their own development futures” Ms. Daley said.

Our Futures, Our Lands opens for one night only Thursday 18th of June, 6.30pm, Chrissie Cotter Gallery, Pidcock Street Camperdown.

For Comment: Ms. Lara Daley, AID/WATCH Director 0411 584 012

Further details can be found on the AID/WATCH website: www.aidwatch.org.au or search for the AID/WATCH fan page on Facebook.

