



MALYSIAN LOGGING COMPANY GUILTY OF HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSE

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Madang Timbers, part of the Malaysian owned WTK Group, has been found guilty of breaching the human rights of a group of eleven security guards employed by the company.

In 2015, the logging company stopped paying the men for the actual hours they worked and instead imposed a fixed salary of K450 per fortnight. This deprived the guards of the paid overtime and the bonus rates for weekends and public holidays they had previously enjoyed. Those benefits had included time and a half for working on Saturdays and double time on Sundays and holidays.

The company's behaviour was harsh and oppressive, unwarranted and could not be reasonably justified, according to Justice Narokobi in [a decision](#) handed down in the National Court.

As well as breaching of S.41 of *The Constitution*, the company's actions were in breach of the *Employment Act* and the *Minimum Wages Board Determination* said the court.

The judge declared that Madang Timbers had denied the men and their families a 'decent wage' and then sacked them in an act of reprisal when they complained to authorities. The act of dismissal was another 'harsh and oppressive' act said the judge.

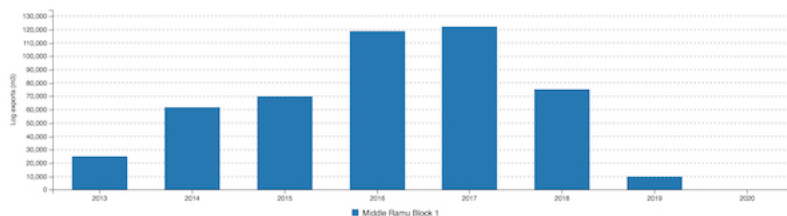
In its defence, Madang Timbers asserted that the men had been dismissed because it had decided to engage a private security firm instead. This was rejected by the judge, who found the company had adduced no evidence to show that a private firm had been engaged as claimed.

Each of the men had a similar story to tell. Most were long serving employees and all had served the company loyally. They were paid an hourly rate with extra pay for overtime, weekends and holidays. But in 2015, they were required to sign new employment contracts. They were not allowed to read the new terms and they were not given copies. After signing the new contracts they found their pay had been substantially reduced. The men wrote letters of complaint to the company management, but although they were told their pay would increase, this did not eventuate. Finally, in 2018, the men took their grievance to the Department of Labour. The local Labour Officer wrote to the company on the men's behalf. That letter was ignored as was a follow up letter. In July 2019, some of the men found out their employment had been terminated after they were again forced to sign documents without being allowed to read them or take copies. A few of the men, wary of being conned a second time, refused to sign.

One guard, Eki Muname, was represented by his widow, Elizabeth, Eki having died in April 2019. Elizabeth Eki told the court her husband had worked long hours for the company, six days a week. He had continued working even though the poor working conditions and overly long hours were making him ill, she said.

During the period of the dispute, Madang Timbers exported over 480,000 cu metres of tropical logs from the Middle Ramu area.

Madang Timbers Limited - Log Exports by Volume 2013-20



Those logs had a declared value of around US\$50 million. In addition the company operated a sawmill supplying timber to the local market.

Madang Timbers is just one of a number of logging companies operating in PNG that are part of the WTK group. Others include Vanimo Forest Products, Amanab Forest Products, Woodbank Pacific, Reach Niugini and Pacific Region Development Limited.

According to the investigative news site, [Sarawak Report](#), WTK is one of 'the big six' Malaysian logging companies operating worldwide. These 'logging tycoons', [it claims](#), 'have become notorious for wreaking havoc on the environment, violating human rights, violating the rights of workers and for corruption and abuse of power'.

The security guards' legal case was scheduled to return to court on February 15 for the assessment of damages.

