

HEY U.T.  
**LET'S CALL IT AMUNGME HALL**  
(INSTEAD OF JAMES B. MOFFETT + FREEPORT-MCMORAN!)

Steven Feld\*

To acknowledge financial contributions from Freeport-McMoRan Inc. CEO James Robert Moffett, the University of Texas System has announced that a new molecular biology building at the Austin campus will bear his name. This announcement has been greeted by swells of student, faculty, and community protest. Some of the resentment regards Freeport's arrogance toward Austin, where its development assaults on the integrity of the Barton Springs watershed are now legendary. Other embarrassment relates to naming a science building to honor a man whose company is one of America's largest corporate polluters and environmental criminals. Additional uneasiness comes from how Freeport's largest mining project abroad proceeds smoothly courtesy of a cozy relationship with the Indonesian government. Indonesian human rights abuses against indigenous Melanesian peoples of West Papua —documented by Amnesty International and other human rights groups— have made the area safe for Freeport Indonesia. And finally, there is increasing annoyance regarding the ethics of a revolving door relationship featuring Freeport's contributions and influence on campus, University Chancellor William Cunningham's work as a well-paid member of Freeport's board of directors, and Freeport's generous prospecting contracts to the UT Geology department. Many feel that this involves a clear conflict of interest. What else can you call the situation when the highest university official personally profits from rental of university staff and facilities, protected by the rhetoric of cultivating donations?

For all of these reasons people of conscience on campus and in the Austin community are condemning any further intrusion of Freeport-McMoRan Inc. at The University of Texas at Austin. Resisting the Moffett name for a campus building has become the key symbol of this struggle. As a contribution to this collective protest, I propose that whatever the University cares to name the building, that a populist faculty, student, and community front be mounted behind an alternative name. For that name I propose AMUNGME HALL, in honor of the Amungme people, the c. 12, 000 indigenous West Papuans who are the traditional land owners of the area that includes the Freeport Indonesia mine site and town. It is the Amungme whose loss of life and land is at the heart of the profits reaped by Freeport Indonesia, and it is in their honor that we should name this building.

Like all indigenous West Papuans, Amungme have suffered from the brutal oppression of their Indonesian colonizers. They have no legal rights to their land, only rights to cultivation. They have had no say in the "economic development" of their homelands for mining or in the removal and resettlement programs that have dispossessed them for the benefit of Freeport Indonesia. Only a few Amungme got a one-time payoff for garden disruption. Others were paid 10 cents an hour (in kind) for construction work in the early days of the mine. When some Amungme rebelled in frustration in 1977 and blew up part of a pipeline, massive Indonesian military retaliations resulted. Gardens and houses were destroyed, people murdered and tortured. Indonesia claimed that "only" 900 were killed. Others put the estimate at twice that number.

What do Indonesia and Freeport Indonesia have to say about this? Their rhetoric is familiar, and it stresses the need for "national integration" and "economic development" in West Papua, officially known as the Indonesian province of Irian Jaya. National integration? What this really means is invasion and domination by powerful outsiders. Economic development? What this really means is occupation, forced subjugation, theft of resources. "National integration" and "economic development" are thinly veiled empowerment and enrichment programs for the Indonesian state military apparatus and for transnational giants like Freeport Indonesia. The result of such programs is massive outsider wealth and equally massive local poverty. The losers are the indigenous Melanesian people of West Papua, including the Amungme. Their lands have been annexed, their wealth has been absorbed. They receive no land rent and no royalties.

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They have virtually no legal, political, or economic recourse to this forced dispossession. "National integration" and "economic development" have made the Amungme, like other West Papuan groups, poor and powerless minorities in their own country.

Thus, with each "development" of the Freeport Indonesia mine there are further disruptions to Amungme life and health. Example: In 1980 Indonesia and Freeport resettled many Amungme in lowland areas, encouraging them to farm away from their homelands around the mine site. Within a few years of the resettlement 20% of resettled Amungme children died due to malaria; as highlanders they had little resistance to the lowlands disease. Example: In 1984 Freeport Indonesia offered the Amungme a deal. In exchange for building desired facilities like clinics, the mining town of Tempagapura and all Freeport facilities would be off-limits to Amungme. Freeport's version of the story emphasizes their social responsibility and humanitarian concern. But what that story masks is a history of negligence, namely the prior introduction of new diseases, in part through widespread use of toxic chemicals whose impacts on the environment and on Amungme health were never carefully monitored or acknowledged.

The Freeport mine in Amungme territory is the world's largest gold reserve and third biggest open-pit copper mine. With reserves of over 25 billion pounds of copper, 40 million ounces of gold, and 75 million ounces of silver, it is worth 40 billion dollars at current market prices. Freeport Indonesia is guaranteed work at the site for many years to come, particularly if they find additional minerals on the 9 million acres of adjacent land that is exclusively theirs to prospect and develop. But no profits have ever been shared nor will be shared with the Amungme; their disenfranchisement is central to Freeport's wealth. The bottom line is that Amungme blood and Amungme dirt stain the celebrated Freeport dollars given to build the molecular biology building. And therefore it is the Amungme people, not CEO Moffett, who should be honored, acknowledged, and respected by the presence of this building on our campus. From now on, let's call it AMUNGME HALL.

Representatives of the University of Texas at Austin announce the renaming of the new Molecular-Biology Building in honor of the Amungme People of West Papua. The University Board of Regents had initially named the building after James and Louise Moffett. However, following significant protests by students and faculty, the university administration finally decided to do the right thing.

