



West Papua: ruled rightfully and willingly by Indonesia or under illegitimate occupation and long overdue independence?

West Papua is half of one of the largest islands in the world just north of Australia. Following a de-colonialisation process from the Netherlands 40 years ago and a controversial referendum it is now part of Indonesia.

Internationally, opinion varies and historically, mistakes have been made. Indonesia has a bad human rights record, however does the Free West Papua movement's failure to penetrate the hearts of the western world illustrate the level of support and legitimacy they have?

This briefing will dip into the history of Papua, the problems encountered and will look to the future.



### HISTORY

Once a united island, Papua was first divided by Dutch colonisers. The British and the Germans colonised the eastern-half - Papua New Guinea - until it gained independence in 1975. However the story for West Papua was not as straightforward. In 1945 a newly formed Indonesia laid claim to the Dutch East Indies and this was granted in 1949. However the Dutch refused to relinquish West Papua, insistent that it was a separate entity.

In the 1960s West Papuans were prepared for independence by the Dutch through the establishment of political parties and the formation of the West Papuan parliament. The Papuan National Congress followed in 1961, deciding:

- West Papua as the country's name
- The Morning Star as the national flag
- 'Papua, my land' as the national anthem.



Indonesia's response to these decisions was Trikora (the three people's commands); to prevent the independence of West Papua, to fly the Indonesian flag in the territory and to launch a general mobilisation of Indonesians to occupy the territory.<sup>1</sup>

Caught up as a pawn in Cold War politics, West Papua found itself as a bargaining tool to ensure Indonesia would not align itself with a communist Russia. Controversially under a UN supported agreement, West Papua would be handed over to Indonesia until a Referendum was held to decide its fate. The 'Act of Free Choice' of 1969 legitimised Indonesian authority and from that day forward West Papua has remained part of Indonesia. While the referendum results gave an illusion of majority support for Indonesian rule, the legitimacy of this referendum has been called into question by international governments.<sup>2</sup>

In 1973 West Papua was re-named Irian Jaya by Indonesia. Irian stood for 'Join the Republic of Indonesia anti Netherlands' and Jaya means 'glorious'.<sup>3</sup> West Papua had at its 1961 Congress affirmed West Papua as the countries name and this was reaffirmed at a National Congress in 2000. Following the special autonomy legislation of 2001 Indonesia dropped Irian Jaya and West Papua was the official name once more.

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## THE ACT OF FREE CHOICE

No West Papuan representative was at the New York meeting in 1962 which recommended interim rule to the UN, until a referendum took place. From the start Indonesia dominated proceedings. It was assumed the referendum would adhere to international principles and be observed by UN officials. However Indonesian principles of representative decision making, *Musyawarah* were upheld and Indonesia selected only 1,022 out of a population of 1 million to vote<sup>4</sup>. The UN team dropped from 50 to 16 with only 5 official observers. Michael Pelletier, one of the UN team, observed that the presence of the Indonesian military during this time was 'overwhelming'. They made it near impossible for the team to monitor effectively. The New York Agreement outlined the responsibility of the team to 'advise, assist and participate' but constant interference and the need to have travel around the territory authorised severely diminished their capacity.<sup>5</sup> An ineffective observation team meant that the Indonesian government carried out a supposedly fair and representative referendum unchecked. The 1,022 West Papuans who were selected to vote, did so under pressure, dressed in formal suits, as opposed to traditional clothing and surrounded in buildings by the Indonesian military.<sup>6</sup> The 'Act of No Free choice' as it is widely referred to in the Independence movement is an issue at the heart of the matter. Many West Papuans feel cheated by the process and believe a new referendum is needed. So far this proposal has only been supported by 3 governments; Vanuatu, Nauru and Tuvalu in the Pacific Islands.<sup>7</sup>

## INDONESIAN AND WEST PAPUAN RELATIONS

"The Struggle for Peace with Justice", a recent publication about West Papua<sup>8</sup> observes that:

*'Many stories are recounted by Papuans... Indonesian troops captured 30 Papuan men, forced them into boats, tied stones around their necks, and threw them overboard... Whether or not these have been independently verified or documented, they all add to the collective trauma of the Papuan people. Even if it is not possible to give definitive totals for human rights violations, the nature of some individual incidents gives a sense of the degree of terror that all Papuans are aware of, and that some Papuans have to endure.'*<sup>9</sup>

The Indonesian policy of transmigration raises concerns that the Papuan culture, deemed inferior to the Indonesian way of life, is at risk. Papuans are facing the reality of being a minority in their own land. Following the fall of General Suharto and his regime in 2000 there was a short period of openness regarding West Papua. The 2001 special autonomy legislation included proposals for additional revenues for the region, a truth and reconciliation commission and the establishment of a Papuan's

Peoples Assembly. These proposals, which would have made some improvements to the situation, have not been fully implemented. The main change has been the allowance to fly the Papuan flag, the Morning Star, not as a mark of independence, but as a cultural symbol.

The philosophical basis of the Indonesian state, Pancasila is based around five principles, one of which is the unity of Indonesia; a love for ones nation and motherland. It envisages the need to always foster national unity and integrity. The Indonesian coats of arms represent 'unity in diversity'<sup>10</sup>

What can 'unity in diversity' mean for many West Papuans? Celebrating unity for Indonesia seems to mean celebrating one kind of unity, that of Indonesia. Pancasila talks about a love of ones nation, not of its people. If West Papua is truly a province of Indonesia, why is the treatment inflicted upon the people and the country so cruel?



## WEST PAPUA TODAY

It is hard to assess the death toll in West Papua caused by the occupation as estimates differ tremendously. Project Ploughshares, the ecumenical agency of the Canadian Council of Churches, have placed the number anywhere between five thousand and hundreds of thousands.<sup>11</sup> One reason the number is hard to determine is because access to the country is closely guarded by Indonesia.

Whilst support has been growing for the Free West Papua movement, this has yet to translate into political pressure. Pressure groups have emerged; generally in areas where West Papuan nationals have found home, namely Australia, the US, UK and Ireland.

Within West Papua there are various independence groups. The numbers of supporters are hard to determine. But they have struggled against the Indonesian State with very few resources. Their dedication to the movement has proven unwavering for decades and now they operate with the support and solidarity of Free West Papua movements across the world.

The United Nations Development Programme undertook a needs assessment of West Papua in August 2005. They reported: 'Papua stands out as one of the few declining regions, actually suffering deterioration in (Human Development Index) status, which is mostly attributed to declines in education coverage and income levels.'<sup>12</sup>

## MINING AND CORPORATIONS

PT Freeport Indonesia, a subsidiary of US based Freeport McMoRan Gold and Copper Inc manage Grasberg, one of the largest mines in the world. Freeport McMoRan and Rio Tinto are their partners. Operations at the mine are shrouded in secrecy and controversial practices. Tensions between the mine and the local communities have not subsided since 2001 despite funding allocated by the companies for training and education programmes.<sup>13</sup> Many believe this was too little too late.

Freeport has operated in West Papua since signing a contract with Indonesia in 1966. It should be noted that this was three years prior to the referendum and official annexation of West Papua to Indonesia. However Indonesia had just been taken over by General Suharto in a military coup, and he desperately needed financial backing.

The affects of the mine in West Papua have been devastating. For example, environmentally, the damage has affected the local communities' ability to develop within their tribal lands, and proper compensation has not been made.

Conflict between the mine and the local community has been further exacerbated by the use of armed security and the close links between the mine and the Indonesian army. In 2005 the New York Times discovered a paper trail which revealed payments from Freeport to the Indonesian military.



"Company records obtained by The New York Times show that from 1998 through 2004, Freeport gave military and police generals, colonels, majors and captains, and military units, nearly \$20 million" *The New York Times*<sup>14</sup>

In recent years there has been increased rioting and demonstrations directed against the mine. It is unclear who initiated this rise in violence however the New York Times reported; 'In recent interviews, current and former Freeport officials recalled how they were stunned when, among those rioting, they saw men with military haircuts, combat boots and walkie-talkies.'<sup>15</sup> The military may have been involved in fermenting violence to secure their presence at the site and therefore their funding. Indonesia received \$33 billion from the mine between 1994 and 2004, yet 40% of Papuans remain in poverty.<sup>16</sup>



Since the fall of Suharto, Freeport's status has been vulnerable. However the financial importance of the mine to Indonesia means that it is in Indonesia's interest to look favourably upon the mine. Freeport has tried to integrate with West Papuans and there are those who believe this is necessary. However years of resentment and the association with the military mean that the West Papuans will not be placated easily.

## THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

In 2005, Tapol (the Indonesian human rights campaign) drew attention to the use of UK arms by Indonesia against peaceful protestors. Reports claimed that two British made Tactica armoured personnel carriers fitted with water cannons had been deployed by the Indonesian authorities to West Papua to control peaceful protests against Jakarta.<sup>17</sup> An article in *The Observer* noted that Labour Ministers have justified controversial arms sales by claiming they have assurances from Indonesia that the weapons will not be used to repress their own civilians.<sup>18</sup>

An Early Day Motion (a kind of parliamentary petition) was put forward in 2005 by Jeremy Corbyn. The Early Day Motion, signed by over 40 MPs joins the increasing number of public actions in the Free West Papua Movement. Each step brings us closer to justice, peace and freedom for West Papua.

## Early Day Motion 1131 (2005)

“That this house is appalled at reported deployment of British-supplied military equipment by Indonesian forces against civilians in West Papua; notes that the British Government has hitherto accepted assurances by the Indonesian Government that the equipment supplied would be used only for external defence; and accordingly calls for a halt to all arms and equipment supplies and an investigation into the abuses of human rights in West Papua.”

## THE FUTURE

West Papuans, once a majority in their own land, now face the real threat of becoming a minority. Their call for a new referendum will become obsolete if the chance of independence continues to be undermined by the vigorous policies of Indonesian transmigration. Many West Papuans feel they were cheated during the 1969 ‘Act of Free Choice’ where only a small proportion of the population were allowed to vote. Redressing this grievance will allow the situation to progress, and help West Papuans to look to the future.

Multi-national companies such as Freeport and BP continue to operate within West Papua. The mines are having a devastating impact on the environmental life, and therefore the agricultural capabilities of many West Papuans. Poverty in West Papua is endemic and the lack of infrastructure is devastating. Although the situation is improving, it is a very long way from reflecting the resource richness of the land of West Papua. In particular, the mining companies must be accountable to the people of West Papua. They should work to ensure sound reinvestment and social responsibility in their operations in order to ease the devastating poverty.



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### FoR Calls for Action:

- Pray for the people of West Papua, for their struggle for Peace and Justice.
- Call into question the legitimacy of the Act of Free Choice and allow West Papuans a chance for real self determination.
- Write to your MP about the sale of British arms, used to repress the people of West Papua.
- Call to account Freeport McMoRan and Rio Tinto.

We would encourage people to write to their MPs and Prime Minister expressing the above concerns.

### Recommended resources

- Neles Tebay, *West Papua, The Struggle for Peace with Justice (CIIR Comment) 2005*
- Papua: answers to frequently asked questions *International Crisis Group, (September 2006)*
- *West Papua, We will be Free New Internationalist, Issue 344.*
- Tapol, *The Indonesia Human Rights Campaign* <http://tapol.gn.apc.org>

## PAPUA, A LAND OF PEACE

When tensions are high, conflicts can be created and manipulated. It was this fear that led religious leaders in West Papua to found the ‘Papua, a Land of Peace’ movement, which can promote an agenda of communication, good relations and brotherhood among all.

Papua, the Land of Peace reflects the deepest desires of Papuans.

Several faith based organisations around the world have organised a solidarity network to support the campaign, Papua, a land of Peace. Together with Papuan religious leaders they have identified three fields of challenge.

- Dialogue – a pressing need for open and genuine dialogue between all parties
- Militarisation – the disproportionate military presence in West Papua is a major challenge for the prospects of peaceful development
- Peace - the campaign is not just a political effort but covers socio-economic development, cultural rights, justice and people’s security.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Neles Tebay, *West Papua, The Struggle for Peace with Justice (CIIR comment) 2005*
- 2 *New Internationalist Issue 344* - <http://www.newint.org/issue344/history.htm>
- 3 *Prevent Conflict, West Papua* [www.preventconflict.org](http://www.preventconflict.org)
- 4 *West Papua Action*, <http://wpaction.buz.org/unreview/#Why>
- 5 Tapol, *The Indonesia Human Rights Campaign: Famine and Neglect in a land of plenty*  
Tapol Bulletin No 181 issued December 2005, <http://www.safecom.org.au/papua-tapol.htm>
- 6 Ibid
- 7 *International Crisis Group: Papua: answers to frequently asked questions*, [www.crisisgroup.org](http://www.crisisgroup.org)
- 8 *The Catholic Institute for International Relations, now known as Progressio*, <http://www.ciir.org>
- 9 Neles Tebay, *West Papua, The Struggle for Peace with Justice (CIIR comment) 2005*
- 10 *Indonesian Embassy in the UK* [http://www.indonesianembassy.org.uk/indonesia\\_facts.html](http://www.indonesianembassy.org.uk/indonesia_facts.html)
- 11 *Project Ploughshares, country profiles: West Papua* - <http://www.ploughshares.ca/>
- 12 *United Nations Development Programme; Papua, Needs Assessment*, <http://www.undp.or.id/papua/>
- 13 [www.riotinto.com](http://www.riotinto.com)
- 14 *The New York Times*, Dec 27th 05 ‘Below a Mountain of Wealth, a River of Waste’
- 15 *The New York Times*, Dec 27th 05 ‘Below a Mountain of Wealth, a River of Waste’
- 16 *Down to Earth*, <http://dte.gn.apc.org/69fd4.htm>
- 17 Tapol, *The Indonesia Human Rights Campaign*, <http://tapol.gn.apc.org>
- 18 *The Observer*, Nov 27th 2005. *Indonesia deploys British arms against protestors*, Antony Barnett <http://www.guardian.co.uk/armstrade/story/0,,1651876,00.html>