



Ending human rights abuses in West Papua

October 2022

Christians, we have maintained, are those who, through confrontation with death, are given a new freedom from the sting of death and so a new freedom for voluntary service to others. Surely if this claim has any truth in it, then it is not our own suffering but the suffering of the world beyond us that must claim our attention. Indeed, is not the whole purpose of our liberation from excessive personal anxiety the creation within us of a new consciousness of and care for others?

Douglas John Hall, 'The Cross in Our Context', 2003, page 154.

The Indigenous Papuan people – the vast majority of whom are Christians –continue to suffer serious and systemic violations of their physical security and human rights, including arbitrary arrests, torture and extrajudicial killings, as well as sexual and gender-based violence, while independent journalists, international humanitarian organisations and human rights monitors are allowed restricted or no access to the territory....

The systematic marginalisation of and discrimination against the Papuan people in their own land is accelerating and intensifying. Moreover, the increasing deforestation of the rainforests of Papua is contributing to the destruction of the 'lungs of the planet' and accelerating the global trajectory towards climate catastrophe. Protection of the rainforest and of the marine ecosystems of Papua – with the vast biodiversity they host – is an urgent necessity.

The Assembly urges all WCC member churches and partners to increase their awareness, accompaniment and support for the people and churches of Tanah Papua in the midst of this longstanding and worsening crisis.

Minute on the Situation in West Papua by the World Council of Churches 11th Assembly, 8 September 2022.

The people of West Papua continue to suffer human rights abuses at the hands of Indonesian security forces. The Uniting Church in Australia partners with the Evangelical Christian Church in Tanah Papua (the GKI-TK).

In March 2022, the West Papuan Council of Churches released a public statement regarding the situation in West Papua. They expressed concern at reports of murders, torture and enforced disappearances at the hands of Indonesian soldiers and police. They called for the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Process. The Council of Churches also called for the following:

- The withdrawal of Indonesian military forces from West Papua, starting with not deploying any additional troops to the region;
- Stopping the building of new military posts;
- The Indonesian Government to assist with the return of more than 60,000 internally displaced people to their homes;
- The Indonesian Government to stop moving to create four new provinces in West Papua. The fear is that the new provinces will provide an excuse to increase the military presence in West Papua; and,
- That there be a dialogue between the Indonesian Government and the United Liberation Movement for West Papua to resolve the armed conflict in the region.

The West Papua Council of Churches thanked the international churches that have supported them:

.... walking with us carrying the cross of the Papuan Nation. The cross we carry is still heavy, the road we are on is still bumpy, our bodies are full of thorns. Therefore we still need the widest possible solidarity and support.

In response to the statement of the West Papuan Council of Churches, Rev Sharon Hollis, the President of the Uniting Church in Australia, said, "I encourage members of the UCA to pray for



peace and justice in West Papua, that human rights are upheld, and the desires of Indigenous Papuans be heard and realised."

On 15 March 2022, Yakob Meklok and Ebron Weipsa, were shot dead by police for participating in a protest in the town of Yahukimo. The protest opposed the Indonesian Government's plans to create four new provinces from the provinces of Papua and West Papua. Since March, the excessive use of force by security forces against those involved in similar peaceful protests has continued.

There was some good news in late September 2022, with the trial of a former army commander commencing on charges of crimes against humanity in West Papua. Retired Major Isak Sattu is being tried over an incident that took place on 8 December 2014 in Paniai Regency, West Papua. Indonesian soldiers under Major Sattu opened fire on a crowd of 800 protesters for up to seven minutes in the town of Enarotali. The soldiers killed five people, including four teenagers. A further 17 to 21 people were wounded. If convicted, Isak Sattu could face 25 years in prison.

The Indonesian military conducted a previous investigation into the massacre. The investigation asserted, without evidence, that the soldiers had not fired on the protesters. Instead, the killings were caused by fire from West Papuan independence fighters from a location 5 km away.

There was also positive news at the end of August 2022, when six Indonesian soldiers were arrested for the murder and mutilation of four Indigenous Papuans. The soldiers had allegedly dismembered the bodies and placed them in sacks with rocks. The bags were then thrown into a river to try and conceal the crime. The victims' bodies were discovered on 26 August by residents of Iwaka village. Indonesian soldiers normally enjoy impunity for committing such murders.

What You Can Do

Write polite and respectful letters to:

Senator the Hon Penny Wong
Minister for Foreign Affairs
PO Box 6100
Senate
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Salutation: Dear Minister



Points to make in your letter:

- Thank the Australian Government for its support of human rights internationally.
- Request Australia's advocacy to the United Nations and the Indonesian Government for:
 - The UN Commissioner for Human Rights to visit West Papua to investigate human rights violations;
 - The Indonesian Government to enter into dialogue with Indigenous West Papuan leaders to seek peaceful solutions to end the ongoing human rights abuses and environmental destruction; and,
 - The Indonesian Government to establish a Truth and Reconciliation Commission as called for by the West Papuan Council of Churches.
- Ask that the Australian Government encourage the Indonesian Government not to deploy additional troops in West Papua and assist more than 60,000 internally displaced people to return to their homes. Further, request the Australian Government to encourage the Indonesian Government to enter into peace talks with the United Liberation Movement for West Papua, as they did with the Free Aceh Movement in resolving the Aceh conflict.
- Ask that the Australian Government urge the Indonesian Government to assist witnesses and the victims' families to be able to attend the trial of retired Major Isak Sattu.