

PAPUA NOWADAYS

PEACE BUILDING AND INTERRELIGIOUS CO-OPERATION

A CONTRIBUTION TO THE DISCUSSION

AT

**CONFERENCE TOWARDS BETTER PEACE
BUILDING PRACTICE**

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1. Some factual information

1. Indonesia is the country with the largest Islam population in the world. The population is about 225 million. Roughly 90% confess themselves as belonging to the Islam-religion. Christians represent a minority, but have often been present in a rather unproportional way: in the government and also especially in the business world. Overrepresentation, especially when connected with the central government, has been often a source of potential conflict for the muslim majority.
2. geografically the christian community is dominant in only two parts of the republic: in Flores and Irian Jaya/Papua. In Papua the demografic majority of christians is challenged nowadays by a heavy migration (planned and spontenaous) from other Indonesian islands, slowly tipping over the demografic balance related to indigenous versus not-indigenous as well as related to christian versus islam
3. the christian community in Papua is divided in a variety of christian denominations, ranging from liberal to fundamentalistic in kind. Consequences of that attitude are reflected in the ways the initial founders of the various denominations have dealt with local traditions and culture.
4. Papua has only been integrated into the Republic of Indonesia during the sixties. The process has been very painfull for the Papuan community as in the proces its voice has been denied completely. Although an official referendum has taken place under supervision of the UN in 1969, everybody familiar with what happened knows that the whole process has been heavily manipulated and voices for independence have been elimintaed. Nevertheless the UN has declared the proces legitimate and has endorsed the official integration in 1969. The whole proces has been marked by political and economical interests of imporant power centers (US and Australia) more than by fairness or respect for the right of people to self-determination. Therefore it is not surprising that what happened way back in the sixties is nowadays the main source for protest and the increasing call for independence.
5. the integration of Papua into the Indonesian republic has been followed by a long period of oppression (30 years); the dignity of the Papuan as a human being has been denied, and people from outside show mainly an attitude of superiority, leaving the Papuan behind as feeling "stupid, uncivilised, and poor". Most painfull to hear Papuans who at the end of this long process talk about themselves as "stupid, uncivilised and poor".
6. since 1998 (the fall of President Soeharto) there has been more room for expression, which has led to a strong call for independence and an awareness among the Papuans that things have to be changed. We are still in the middle of that new movement, while slowly the room for expression is decreasing again; the Indonesian government and security will not allow a 'second East Timor'-story and feels itself backed up by

important powers in the world, including the US, Australia and the European Community.

2. The Basic attitude of the Papuans

It is worthwhile to note that the Papuans have one very fundamental attitude, namely the desire to "regulate themselves". Throughout their history, Papuans have proven to be able to regulate themselves so as to be able to maintain their existence for many centuries. This fundamental attitude has also been shown by the Papuans to everybody and to whatever agency indicated any tendency to stifle their chances to regulate themselves. Such an attitude was shown in their encounter with the Dutch government, missionaries and traders, and newcomers in general. It was not surprising, therefore, that any agency that wanted to "control" the Papuans often resorted to violence. In view of this fundamental attitude, it was also not surprising that December 1, 1961 was written with golden letters in the pages of Papuan history, as at that time the Dutch government opened up a very agreeable future perspective for that fundamental attitude by initiating "the process of freedom". The loss of this perspective through an international political game in the sixties left a deep scar for the Papuans.

2.1. Three factual elements

While bearing the above fundamental attitude in mind, special attention should be given to three factual elements that also underlie Papuan problems today:

1. A complex of experience during the last decades, we like to refer to as the collective "Memoria Passionis" ("memory of suffering")

The painful experiences had their sources in:

- a. the development policy followed by the Indonesian government over the last 38 years;
- b. dozens of human right violations in Papuan territory during its integration into the Republic of Indonesia.
- c. the behavior of the Indonesian armed forces in this territory, commonly marked by arrogance and a high-handed show of power.

1. Events during modern Papuan history, such as:

- a. The program for freedom initiated by the Dutch Government on December 1, 1961 by (1) nominating representatives of the local community to become 50% of the total membership of the *Nieuw Guinea Raad* (parliament); (2) flying the Morning Star flag beside the Dutch flag; and (3) "socializing" the national anthem "Oh Papua, My Land".

- b. The adoption of the New York Agreement (NYA) of 1962 as the basis of the transfer of *Nederlands Nieuw Guinea* from the Dutch to the Indonesian governments. This basic agreement was made without the participation of Papuans themselves in the negotiation.
- c. The Determination of the People's Opinion (PEPERA; english: Act of Free Choice) in 1969, which was implemented incorrectly as it was accompanied by intimidation, coercion, torture, and unilateral interpretation of the conditions of the implementation laid down in the NYA.

3. The protest of the public has not been heard—there has been no serious response by the ruler

Thus

- a The Papuans have never felt that their dignity and identity as real people were recognized;
- a. The Papuans have never felt that they were acknowledged and protected as full Indonesian citizens with full rights and obligations, as provided in paragraph 4 of the preamble of the Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia (the 1945 Constitution).

2.2. Silence because of helplessness

The sufferings summarized above finally produced a community which was bitterly disappointed and deeply frightened; a community which felt isolated and abused and useful only as an object of projects which it was not consulted about, and which had been forced to hold back its anger for many, many years. It is quite natural that one day the "memory of collective suffering" would finally reveal itself and become a source of "strength in the struggle", once the opportunity arose.

3. Office for Justice and Peace

Since a couple of years we have started a small office to respond to developments in Papua, especially focused on the human rights violations, and at a later stage slowly switching to more 'solution oriented' activities, towards peacebuilding and reconciliation.

The main fields of activities are:

1. reporting on incidents, dealing with human rights violations; a field of advocacy and trying to open up the truth. The first eye-opening official report on human rights violations has been published in 1995 under the responsibility of the Bishop of Jayapura.
2. spreading information; although we are mainly involved with the community of the victims, we have found that an important part of the work should be to make other parties understand what is really going on and what is behind the protests. We are looking for understanding

in non-Papuan circles and eventually their sympathy or readiness to listen as we are aware of the fact that no solution will be found without involving other parties. We use local and national newspapers for this and try to publish every year a short analysis about developments over the past year.

3. we offer courses to the local community; these courses deal with human rights issues, but above all are meant to help the local community to understand themselves, and to discover that it is possible for them to handle their own situation. After the course we hope that a number of the participants get organised and can act as a kind of 'counterpart' of our office. To them to pick up the local issues or problems and they can be sure that they will find support through our office and access to the people they like to address.

Through the various field of activities we hope to create openings to mutual understanding as well as a willingness to dialogue, as for us moving to a dialogue is the main option in order to solve the problems, including the political ones.

4. Church's involvement

Although our office is an integral part of the Catholic Church in Papua, we look for a dialogue with other Protestant Churches at moments we try to respond to developments. All our human rights reports are signed by the leaders of the three main churches in Papua. We value it very important to take a stand together, as the churches are an important institution in our area and often the only place people can rely on. The trust people have in churches demands from the churches to act accordingly.

In this context of cooperation I would like to mention a number of elements which might be worthwhile to be discussed:

1. first of all I feel that within church-circles 'work for conflict transformation' or 'peace-building' is not yet looked upon as a very integral part of the church-mission. Churches (including my own) appreciate and even support the activities but value them also as something 'special'; or in other words this field of activity is not valued as an element of mission that should be a normal element in any pastoral activity. Shouldn't it be at the very heart of the church-mission nowadays?
2. related to remark above, the question still becomes more relevant when we realise that a number of churches/denominations we are working with rely completely on 'outside' NGO's for any activity related to human rights, or conflict transformation work/peacebuilding.
3. the attitude showed in the two previous remarks might be directly related to a kind of globally used argument that the "church should stay away from politics". The argument is eagerly used by all parties: (a) by the church to stay away from a sensitive field of action (especially when the church is socially in a minority position), as well as (b) by the government or security-forces (in order to keep a potential critical institution –which has the trust of the people- silent).

4. connected with the argument above, it might be questioned whether there is any room for neutrality / impartiality?, when a church or religious denomination takes its mission serious to establish peace, to create a new world? Shouldn't working on justice and peace assume that we opt for the weak party, the powerless, the oppressed? I feel that within the mission of the church there is no real room for impartiality, if the church likes to be faithful to its mission.
5. to enable its commitment as a religious denomination or church with peace-building activities, a re-evaluation is necessary as to the initial impact of the missionary work done in the past. Too often, referring to the situation in Papua, missions have robbed the local community of its most dearest property: tradition and local values, and with it has robbed the Papuan of its identity as a person or people. We better be honest on what has happened in the past in order to create the real room for peacebuilding which bases itself first of all on respect of the own identity of the people, and the recognition of its undeniable dignity as human being. Without that respect there is no way for conflict transformation, I guess.
6. while mentioned elements of discussion are mainly related to various churches, it must be said that up till today hardly any constructive relation has been established between the churches and the Islam-community. As churches are very emotionally related to the local population and even part of the people's new identity, the increasing influence of Islam has been looked at as dangerous. Almost a natural reaction, and no need has been felt to deal with this attitude, while still till today often claiming that Papua is a christian island (which is not that true anymore). Looking at the activities in my own office it can be said that only over the last year we have constructively sought the support by the Islam-community, when we planned to launch an appeal against the increasing violence (by all parties); the islamic leader was eager to join in with six other leaders of christian churches. It is a very first start of a needed and constructive cooperation.

Religious institutions in Papua have a huge opportunity to serve the people by getting involved in conflict transformation work, as the conflict is at the moment felt by all, even in the most remoted part of the inland. People look at the church with trust, up to the churches to respond to it and to prove itself trustworthy.