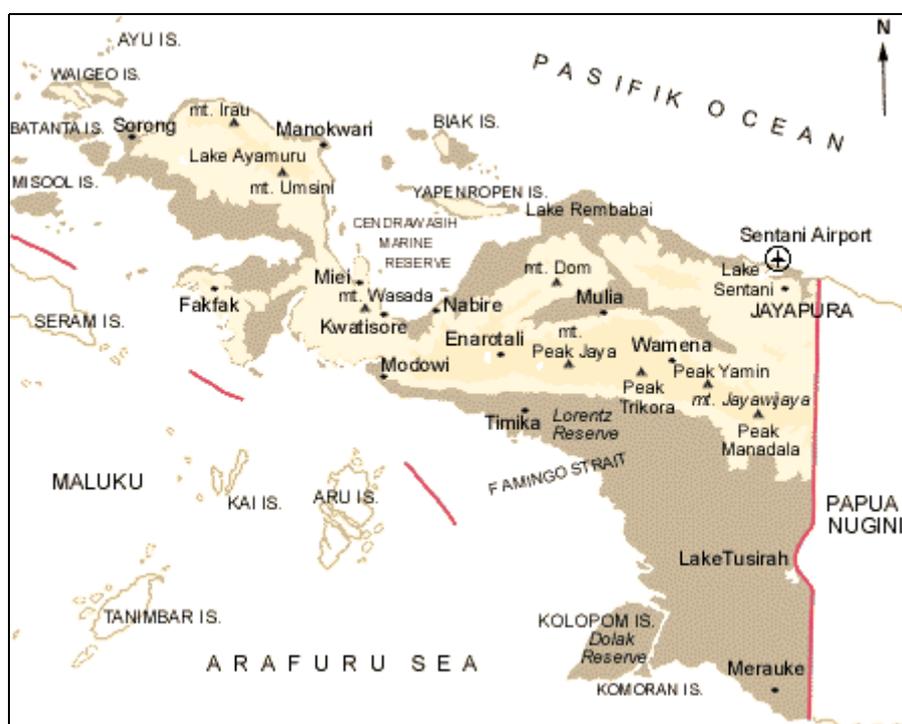


# BEYOND RELIGION AND CULTURE<sup>1</sup>

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*"We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work. Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of saying that the kingdom always lies beyond us". (Oscar Romero, the Archbishop of San Salvador)*

This quotation is the best way to express our efforts as the Office of Justice and Peace (abbreviated as JP) of the Catholic Church in Papua in dealing with social justice and peacebuilding in Papua. Our efforts to promote justice and to build peace among people in Papua and confront perennial problems of existence would have been impossible if they were not based on principles which transcend both religion and culture.

In this paper, I would like to share our efforts at promoting justice and peace in Papua in two main parts: [1] our main concerns and involvement and [2] some repeated challenges which JP has to deal with. To begin, I will discuss the history of JP.

## **A brief history**

JP emerged from the process of reflection and engagement between the Catholic Diocese of Jayapura and the realities it faced in Papua during the Indonesian political turmoil in mid-1998 when President Soeharto was toppled

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was presented at the CIIR round table discussion on *the role of faith-based groups and civil society in promoting peace and development in West Papua and Mindanao*, Quezon City, The Philippines, 10-12 February 2003.

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by the student movement. The impact of the fundamental shift in this highest level of Indonesian politics was very significant for Papua because it burst the bubble of the euphoria of democracy which inspired Papuans to speak out about their feelings, concerns, hopes for justice, welfare, and peace.

The Papuans expressed these suppressed feelings in demonstrations supported by students in Jayapura, the capital of the province. The notion of demonstration suddenly changed to an independence aspiration when the army shot the student protesters inside the State University of Cenderawasih killing one student, Stephen Suripatty<sup>3</sup>, and injuring several others. People raised the *Morning Star*, the Papuan flag, in several districts capitals across the province as a demand for justice and peace. However, the authorities misinterpreted these spontaneous expression as rebellions which had to be suppressed by military operations<sup>4</sup>. These harsh responses fuelled the militancy of Papuans to assert their rights.

In the midst of the chaos, the Catholic church took a stance against the continuing bloody violence by establishing a new office which was called the Office for Justice and Peace in July 1998 with a specific mission: to deal with social justice issues. The church still continued articulating its deep concerns with the developments in Papua by collaborating with all other organizations such as tribal leaders, Papuan women's groups, religious organizations, etc., in setting up FORERI. This was a neutral forum which attempted to create space for a dialogue between people and the authorities. JP was founded by the Catholic church as its response to the socio-political situation in Papua.

### **Concerns and involvement**

Over the past five years, JP has promoted the Church's dream of justice and peace in Papua. The cornerstone of this program has been its human rights advocacy program, which has focussed on investigations into the human rights violations committed by the military in the highland areas of Enarotali (Paniai) in 1998<sup>5</sup> and the Star Mountains in 1999<sup>6</sup>. These investigations resulted in reports which were presented to the public, the governor and the Territorial Military Commander. The Trikora Territorial Military Commander then sent a verification team to the Star Mountains area to check whether the church report was true or false. Eventually, he confirmed that the report was true and acknowledged the violations and apologized to the people. He also withdrew and charged the deployed troops and replaced them. In Paniai area,

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<sup>3</sup> See *appendix*

<sup>4</sup> See ELSHAM report, *Nama Tanpa Pusara, Pusara Tanpa Nama*, Jayapura, 1999.

<sup>5</sup> Paniai area and some other areas used to be under the status of a military operation zone (together with Aceh Province) during Soeharto regime. Being a military operation zone meant that the military was in charge and the martial law was enforced. Under the circumstances, the civil rights were not respected and public servants do not have power. Although the status was lifted in 1998, there was no real changing on the ground. See, *Human Rights Condition in Paniai and Tigi Areas*, Jayapura: The Office for Justice and Peace of the Catholic Diocese of Jayapura, October 1998.

<sup>6</sup> See, the reports of the Office for Justice and Peace of the Catholic Diocese of Jayapura namely, *The Impact of the presence of security forces on the social and human rights situation in Star Mountains area, from 1998-early 1999*, Jayapura, July 1999, and *a report on the social situation in Star Mountains area*, Jayapura, June 2002

the Territorial Military Commander rotated troops even though he did not acknowledge their responsibility for the violations in this area.

These reports provided a point of reference for the victims, helping to identify themselves as communities with dignity and legitimate rights which should be respected and protected. The more we were involved in the social justice issues, the more we realized what people felt, thought and needed. What people required was not only an investigation which changed their situation but also some assistance to organize themselves to deal with the human rights abuses, to build their society based on principles of justice and human dignity, and even to develop their critical thinking. Eventually our experiences of working with the people were crystallized in four main programs as follows:

1. Human rights advocacy
2. Socializing the complexity of the Papua problem
3. Efforts towards peaceful solutions
4. Participation in a larger network

### **1. Human rights advocacy**

Human rights advocacy has been a part of the JP programs, especially the human rights training for these and other communities. We have also started to combine international human rights norms and Indonesian legislation with the idea of reconciliation and peacebuilding. Through such training, we have the first-hand knowledge of their situation and also the depth of people's feelings on various current issues influencing their lives. The main points of the training are to teach them about their rights under the law, discuss the context for social development in Papua, and empower them with basic organizational skills. Therefore, over the past five years, we have set up several community-based groups: three in the Star Mountains, two in the Baliem Valley, and one in Bidogai, with basic skills to make simple but accurate reports and to negotiate either among themselves or with the local authorities. Through this collaboration, these community-based groups have supported and strengthened the work of JP. Since 2002, in collaboration with local NGOs, JP has expanded the capacity building program by emphasizing other aspect of human rights, particularly economic justice and women's issues.

One of JP contributions in human rights advocacy was its involvement in the *ad hoc* investigation commission under the Indonesian National Human Rights Commission, which made an investigation into the Police attack on civilians in Abepura, 7 December 2000. This was the first time a formal investigation under the new Law on Human Rights Court No. 26/ 2000 had been conducted in Papua. The commission found evidence that led to the conclusion that the Papua's Provincial police had committed crimes against humanity. The Commission submitted their report to the Attorney General in August 2001 who had to follow the prosecution. However, after two years, the dossier remains pending and the Attorney General only charged two police officers and this case has not yet been brought to trial.

In April 2002, JP got an opportunity to deliver a speech on behalf of *the Franciscans International and Dominicans for Justice and Peace* in Geneva

regarding social justice issues in Papua during the 58<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN Commission on Human Rights. This was significant since it presented a picture of the Papuan problem to the international community.

## **2. Socializing the complexity of the Papua problem**

For many people in Papua and elsewhere in Indonesia, Papua remains neglected in people's awareness and education. JP tries to provide current information and analyses to the public through two series of publications<sup>7</sup>. We aim to provide reliable human rights resources even though we realized to date we have made limited use of the Internet to reach a wider audience.

JP has also made direct representation to senior government officials. In June 2000, JP provided updated information to the Papuan Bishops who had a private audience with then President Abdurrahman Wahid who had asked for some insights from church leaders into the Papuan problem. JP has always been willing to participate and contribute to any reasonable forum which attempts to resolve social justice issue. Through our involvement in these activities JP has also gain knowledge and experiences from others which has helped develop our ministry.

## **3. Efforts towards peaceful solution**

Promoting peaceful solutions to current problems in Papua is the most challenging part of our work because it requires different capacities to advocacy, such as space for negotiation, listening, and immediate action. Since 2000 JP has endorsed inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogues in dealing with social justice problems because we believe that social justice issues go beyond any religious and cultural boundaries. Religious institutions have primary responsibility to be involved in social justice and peacebuilding issues.

One example of our efforts towards a peaceful solution is our role in mediating during a crisis which occurred when two Belgian film-makers were taken hostage in Ilaga in 2001 by the Free Papuan Movement led by Mr Titus Murib. This was not the first hostage-taking incident in Papua's history but was still a very complicated problem to solve because of several factors including: [1] the international diplomatic sensitivity, [2] the government's reputation which was under international pressure to address the problem peacefully, [3] the consequences for the local people who had often been victimized during past military operations, [4] the political demands of the hostage takers, and [5] the logistical difficulties due to the remoteness of the area which lacks basic infrastructure. The churches resolved the crisis peacefully in collaboration with the Chief of Police in Papua and various journalists. A similar situation had happened earlier in 2001 when Korean businessmen were taken hostage by the Free Papuan Movement led by Mr Willem Onde in Merauke. The Archdiocese of Merauke was involved in solving the crisis peacefully in collaboration with the Regent of Merauke and Papua's Chief of Police.

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<sup>7</sup> See, *Some Information on The Office for Justice and Peace of the Catholic Diocese of Jayapura, Papua*, 2003.

For the public, the well-explained situation would be a method to demythologize the single-minded belief that Papua problem is merely a matter of politics and the only solution is a political independence. This belief has overwhelmed not only ordinary people but also the government, researches, religious leaders, NGO activists, and politicians even though from different point of views. On the one hand, the government has a clear position that Papua has been a part of Indonesia and assumes that the root cause of independence sentiment is poverty and that the only appropriate answer is development. On the other hand, some journalists<sup>8</sup>, researches and human rights activists often think that the prolonged suffering of the people will only be resolved by independence regardless of the consequences. It is very rare to have an opportunity to hold a genuine dialogue based on the true feeling of the people with an open ended outcome. The Special Autonomy Law more or less was the win-win solution for Papua<sup>9</sup> until President Megawati issued her Presidential Decree no. 1/2003 which essentially opposed the hierarchy of the Indonesian Law and incited Papuans to fight among themselves.

In the midst of this deteriorating situation, JP continues to assist religious leaders in Papua in dealing with the situation. An example of this is the recent peace statement to the President regarding the division of the Province of Papua and the ecumenical prayer gathering in Jayapura, February 5, 2003.

#### **4. Participation in a larger network**

We believe that social injustice is an institutionalized evil embedded in the social, economic, and political structures around the world. Therefore, networking and collaboration are crucial in addressing these issues. Inside the Church, JP has encouraged the three other Catholic dioceses in Papua and other Christian denominations to have similar offices able to assist people in dealing with social justice problems. Theologically, there is no constraint or reluctance to address these issues but problems remain in implementing these ideals into real situations. These always requires human resources, feasible programs, sufficient equipment and funds. Fortunately, there have been JP sister offices in the three other dioceses in Papua, namely Merauke, Agats, and Sorong. Similar steps have been taken by the other Christian churches which have set up institutions within their own circle, including the Bureau for Justice and Peace of the Christian and Missionary Alliance and the Bureau for Human Rights and Legal Aid of the Evangelical Christian Church. As a contribution, JP Jayapura has assisted them by providing some internship for staff of these other organizations. Hopefully, these new offices will provide greater assistance to the people through a larger network of services.

At the national level, we have collaborated with several human rights NGOs based in Jakarta which have particular programs for/ in Papua, such as

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<sup>8</sup> One of the examples is a John Martinkus' article "Paradise Betrayed: West Papua's struggle for independence", in *Quarterly Essay*, No. 7, 2002 which is challenged by other opinions of Chris Ballard, Bruce Grant, James Hamilton, etc. in *Quarterly Essay*, No. 8, 2002.

<sup>9</sup> Sumule, A., "Swimming against the current: the drafting of the Special Autonomy Bill for the Province of Papua and Its Deliberation in the Indonesia National's Parliament", in: *Journal of Pacific History*, forthcoming.

ELSAM and PBHI. We have also had access to and support from the JPIC, the International Franciscan for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation network, which exists as a part of the Franciscan ministry. It was not until 2001 that JP had the opportunity to meet personally with a representative of of the JPIC network who works in the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva. The purpose of this larger network is that we are able to share concerns, knowledge, and collaboration with others. We realized the value of such collaborations is in launching national or international programs, lobbying and providing updated national or international information, but JP remains responsible for the day-to-day issue in Papua.

### **Some challenges**

At a glance, JP's work in Papua appears to be a success story. However, there have been some real challenges which hinder and even undermine our efforts. Some of these problems include:

1. As a young institution, JP has several limitations especially human resources (4 staff) and experience and we are responsible for a large area<sup>10</sup>. We are very grateful that the other churches have been installing their own JPs which will assist people with more services on the ground.
2. Among the Christian discourse in Papua and throughout Indonesia, social justice issues are still considered as separate and secular from the (religious) mainstream. Part of the reason for this perception is that opinion is rooted in a lack of knowledge and awareness of social justice problems. There is also a common misunderstanding that promoting social justice is misinterpreted as a desire to undermine government authority. This is why JP's mission and ministry is not always perceived as a church ministry that tries to address social justice issues but as a political intervention.
3. The central government does not have a clear and consistent policy for the development of the Province of Papua. Two years ago, the national parliament and the central government agreed and signed the Special Autonomy Law No. 21/2001 which gave full authority to the Province of Papua to govern itself. However, the President recently made a decree (Inpres No. 1/2003) to divide Papua into three provinces, breaching the existing Special Autonomy Law and the hierarchy of the Indonesian legal system<sup>11</sup>. This action has reaffirmed the Papuan belief that Jakarta does not have political will to recognize their rights, and thereby help to solve the Papuan problem peacefully<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> See, *Annual Report Of The Office For Justice And Peace Of The Catholic Diocese of Jayapura*, January 2003.

<sup>11</sup> This decree raised strong opposition from several parties including tribal leaders, religious leaders, the chairman of the provincial parliament, members of the national parliament who represent the Province of Papua, NGOs and the Governor.

<sup>12</sup> For the chronological account of the major violent incidents in Papua from 1998-2002, see appendix.

4. In terms of independence aspiration, there is a widespread belief that Papuan independence is imminent and it will be automatically followed by welfare and prosperity. In the reformation era (since May 1998), Papuans have been more ready to speak out their belief especially during public gatherings or public meetings. JP has found it a complicated task to demythologize this belief because some political activists frequently exploit it for their own interest. JP also recognizes that these gatherings provide catharsis for many people during stressful times. The situation can be exacerbated by the presence of some foreign activists, journalists, researchers or whoever with sympathy for the aspiration who reproduce this in more sophisticated and convincing ways without measuring the consequences for the locals.
5. "Collaboration" is a nice word to say but it is really hard to achieve either with people or NGOs or religious institutions. JP discovered that it was hard to build a mutual understanding or to coordinate different contributions of institutions with concerns and involvement in social justice issues. The fact is that several human rights organizations have similar programs which inevitably duplicate each other.
6. Lack of law enforcement, rampant corruption, collusion and nepotism are the major issues which always lurk in Papua and throughout Indonesia. The provincial and central government have to address these problems if they want to bring justice and prosperity to the people and to restore the people's trust. The Papuan people have suffered from a corrupt public service at all levels which lacks skills, moral integrity, effective control and accountability. In the current climate where human resources are still limited, the recent Presidential Decree to establish three new regencies and split Papua into three new provinces will only further jeopardize the situation<sup>13</sup>.

## **Conclusion**

In the final analysis, I would say that the any efforts to make peace and justice in Papua must go beyond religion and culture. Inter-religious and inter-cultural collaborations pave the way to justice and peace. However, this journey is somehow unpredictable and requires our full imagination, efforts, creativity, and moral integrity.

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<sup>13</sup> The Governor of Papua underlines this issues in relation to the Presidential Decree. See, *Cenderawasih Pos* (the local newspaper), 7 February 2003.