

## Church, community and working towards human rights in West Papua<sup>1</sup>

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I feel disoriented to discuss this topic as some questions, particularly the words “church” and “Papua”, have confronted my identity. Being a Franciscan brother, I am not part of the Catholic hierarchy so I am not in the position to talk on behalf of the church. Given a Javanese man, part of the largest population in Indonesia which is commonly considered the colonial people by the rest of Indonesian tribes, including the West Papuan society, I am not able to represent the Papuan people. However, I was trained in the western philosophy and Catholic theology which entrenched my personal life and gave me other dimensions in dealing with the other. Finally, having engaged with the social justice issues in West Papua, I have become a human rights worker which shares universal values of humanity and thus, gives me another identity. Therefore, my presentation here is based on my converged identities but particularly relies on my identity as a member of a community which believes that human dignity has to be respected, protected and promoted regardless race, religion, gender, culture, ideology and any other differences.

### **A brief description of the problem**

The Province of Papua (West Papua or formerly Irian Jaya) is often exposed as ‘lost paradise’, ‘land of naked men’ (Dirole 1976), ‘paradise betrayed’ (Martinkus 2002), ‘isolated people’ (government). Such stereotyped understandings simply lead to inadequate conclusion which do not help anyone to understand the real situation. Having engaged with human rights issues in West Papua, I find that Papua has an enormously complex issue which cannot be simplified to such a black and white picture. Unfortunately, such an image has been a widespread popular knowledge within Indonesia and outside Indonesia.

Today, West Papua is a homeland for 2,1 million people (the 1999 national census) – compared to 200 million people as the whole Indonesian population—who live in an area as large as 422 thousand km<sup>2</sup> and consist of 42% migrants and 58% indigenous Papuans. In terms of religious population, West Papua consists of 58% Protestants, 24% Muslims, 16% Catholics and 12% Buddhists, Hindus and various traditional beliefs. These diverse backgrounds have formed West Papua as a multi-cultural society which has lived together in harmony. However, behind this daily reality lies protracted problems which has caused tension and conflict in the province for almost four decades. There are three fundamental problems.

*First*, the historical and political questions of the transfer of power from the Dutch to Indonesia administrations in the late of 1960s. The West Papuan elite claim that the transfer was unlawful as only 1,022 Papuan representatives voted to integrate to Indonesia whereas the 1962 New York Agreement stipulated that the plebiscite should have been done under the principle of “one man, one vote” so that the West Papuan people demand a review over the UN resolution on the adoption of the result of the 1969 Act of Free Choice. Moreover, West Papuan people perceive that in 1961 they had been in the preparation of an independent state when the Dutch administration provided them with key national symbols: the Morning star flag, *Hai Tanahku Papua* (Oh, Papua My Land) as the national anthem, and the House of Representatives. (Saltford 2002:11). Such a position was echoed several times, including during the

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audience with then President Habibie in February 1999, the Papuan Deliberation in February 2000 and the Second Papuan Congress in 2000.

As a response to this position, Indonesia government repeatedly asserts its sovereignty over West Papua and the whole country underlining the historical roots of the country back to Majapahit era in the thirteenth century prior to Indonesian state (Indonesian Permanent Mission to the UN 2003:9). Furthermore, the government emphasises the legality of the 1969 Act of Free Choice as it was unanimously ratified by the UN general assembly resolution no 2054 (XXIV) on 19 November 1969 (Indonesian Delegation to the UNCHR 2003). In terms of bilateral relations between Australia and Indonesia after Bali bombing, these two countries achieved an agreement to tackle separatism in Papua.

The *next* problems are gross human rights violations which have occurred since the integration with Indonesia. Since the first report of the human rights violations in Papua in 1995, the Catholic office for Justice and Peace of the Diocese of Jayapura has documented 27 unresolved cases across the province during the last five years under the so called democratic regime (Hernawan 2003). It was not until 2000 the Indonesian House of Representatives promulgated Act no. 26 on the Human Rights Court. This Act provides real power to the judicial system, particularly the National Commission on Human Rights, to address gross human rights violations all over Indonesia which were mostly committed by the security forces and the police. Based on such a strong provision, West Papua obtained the first opportunity to deal with its human rights case which occurred in Abepura on 7 December 2000 when the police launched an operation following an attack to the police station by a unknown group. As a response to serious concerns raised by the churches leaders in West Papua, the National Commission for Human Rights made an investigation into the case and found sufficient evidence to conclude that the police in West Papua committed crimes against humanity during its operation targetting students and civilians. Furthermore, the Commission submitted this dossier to the Attorney General in August 2001 to be prosecuted. Surprisingly, two years later, in May 2003 the Attorney General stated that the case was being delayed to be brought in the human rights court as the Ministry of Finance had not yet approved its proposed budget (*Kompas* 24 May 2003). This situation illustrates the political will of the government in dealing with gross human rights cases in West Papua.

*Finally*, part of the problems lies in welfare issues. As a province endowed with rich natural resources, West Papua has contributed large portion to the Indonesian economy. As an illustration, PT Freeport Indonesia which has mined gold and copper since 1967 was the largest single taxpayer contributing US\$180 million a year during 1991-2001 and the source of over 50 percent of Papua's GDP. In 1997 Pertamina (a State-owned oil company) and Arco (later purchased by British Petroleum) began a new project to develop the 24 trillion cubic foot Tangguh natural-gas field in the Bird's Head region of West Papua. Under the optimum operation in 2015, this project will contribute US\$ 200 million to provincial and local governments (Blair and Phillips 2003:51-54).

Despite the large revenue contributed to Indonesian economy, the province is ranked the second poorest province in Indonesia. Furthermore, the literacy rate for women is 44 percent compared to 78 percent in the rest of Indonesia; and for men, 58 percent compared to 90 percent for the whole country. Only 10% of the West Papuan people have a high school education and only 1 percent has graduated from college (Blair and Phillips 2003:74-75). Such a description illustrates the vast poverty which subsequently has caused injustice and resentment across the province to the government.

As a response to this issue, the National House of Representatives passed the law no 21 of 2001 on the Special Autonomy for the Province of Papua which is supposed to address the unjust problem and improve the living-condition of West Papuans. Under this provision, the provincial government technically will increase its budget allocation by threefold from Rp. 800 billion (US\$ 63 million) to Rp.2.5 trillion (US\$277 million) plus the other Rp 400 billion (US\$ 45 million) funds from the central government and Rp 770 billion (US\$86.5 million) from the share of revenues (ICG 2002:8). However, this step was stalled following the Presidential Decree no. 1/ 2003 on the division of the province into three new provinces which bypassed this provision and sparked uncertainty to the authority and power of the provincial government (Franciscan International 2003).

Having followed this description, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that West Papuan people remain suffering from vast poverty; feel that their dignity is denied due to prolonging gross human rights violations; and perceive that their rights was neglected. Therefore, their demands for justice, freedom and rights are justified and converged to a struggle for independence.

### **Dealing with human rights issues in West Papua**

Having engaged with the protracted problems in West Papua, the Catholic church in West Papua believes that to deal with human rights issues is the core of the gospel itself. Subsequently, the Church through the Office for Justice and Peace has been deeply engaged with the following efforts.

In 1995 when some of the Amungme people were captured, tortured and killed by the military inside of the Freeport concession area because they were labelled as part of Free Papua Movement (OPM) and thus, targetted by the military operations as a major threat to the mining operations even though they were proved civilians. Bishop of Jayapura, Msgr. Muninghoff OFM, reported this to the National Commission on Human Rights and at the same time, ACFOA raised this case in the international level. This was the very first case of gross human rights violations in West Papua reported at both national and international levels.

In the midst of tension and fear in 1998, the Catholic Church in conjunction with other church denominations, NGOs, women groups and students groups established Forum Rekonsiliasi Masyarakat Irian (FORERI) or a Forum for Reconciliation of Irianese People. At the same time, Bishop of Jayapura, Msgr. Leo Laba Ladjar OFM founded the Office for Justice and Peace which was commissioned to deal with social justice issues across the region. Subsequently, this office provides:

- human rights training and capacity bulding for indigenou people at the grass roots level as we believe that social justice should be a people's momevement,
- works closely with relevant human rights networks to promote justice
- and endorses ecumenical collaboration in promoting human rights and peace.
- part of these commitments was our interventions to the Sessions of the UN Commission on Human Rights in 2002 and 2003 in conjunction with the Franciscan International in Geneva to raise international awareness (Franciscan International 2002 and 2003).

Having engaged with social and political developments in West Papua, in November 2002, the Office hosted a peacebuilding conference attended by key organizations in West Papua, including religious leaders, NGOs, academics, members of the

Provincial House of Representatives. Through this conference, we have formulated our perception of "Papua as land of Peace" as this jargon has been very frequently used by anybody without pondering the substance. The conference was followed by some activities, such as rally for peace in Jayapura, ecumenical prayer for peace involving government officials and the Chief of Police in Jayapura but again, the military accused such initiatives as a pretext of political movements or separatism (Office for Justice and Peace 2002).

In the last four months, the church in conjunction with the coalition of NGOs and religious leaders have dealt with an extremely difficult situation in Wamena (a town in the highlands) following a burglary to the military arsenal on 4 April 2003 by an unidentified group. Instead of allowing the police to undertake a legal investigation, the military took over the case and deployed troops (including the Special Forces) from Jakarta to hunt down the attackers but it is proved that they have simply targetted innocent people, caused 13 casualties, arrested and tortured at least 47 people and have burnt down several villages, including houses, people's livelihood, primary schools (Koalisi LSM 2003). While the group is still unidentified, this case remains isolated from the large media coverage and the government has not done anything to deal with the innocent victims. Last week, the military intimidated our witnesses and forced them to withdraw all testimonies they have given to the Coalition of NGOs.

Based on these experiences, I have to admit that the human rights condition in West Papua by and large remains similar and subsequently, have overwhelmed us due to the amounting cases and enormous pressure while there are only few capable organisations can deal with these issues. The outside world is preoccupied with fighting terrorism so that most of the countries in the region do not want to jeopardize their diplomatic relations with Indonesia by raising some concerns to West Papua with only 2,1 million people. So far, only Nauru and Vanuatu, small countries in the Pacific, pay a lot of attention to our situation in Papua. Australia, for example, this year provides A\$10 million grant to Indonesia as part of A\$ 121 million foreign aid, to enable the police in fighting terrorism in Indonesia. I am afraid that these Australian taxpayers monies will go to the security forces in fighting separatism in Aceh, Maluku and Papua which has been labelled by the government as terrorism.

### **Concluding remarks**

Having engaged with the people and their problems, I believe some fundamental issues should be comprehensively addressed. First, the West Papua problem is a triangulation of welfare issues, gross human rights violations and historical and political issues. All problems should be acknowledged to develop deep understanding and adequate strategies toward peaceful solutions. Subsequently, the government should implement the Law on the Special Autonomy; deliver justice to the victims by bringing all perpetrators of human rights violations to human rights court; and open a political dialogue towards peaceful solutions.

Secondly, all parties who wish to solve the problems in West Papua should understand the intricate problems of West Papua and should not simplify the problem merely into a conflict of political interests or welfare issues. Such one-sided approach most likely will exacerbate the situation instead of benefitting the victims.

Finally, I invite the international community, particularly Australian public as the closest neighbour in the region, to draw some serious attention in respect to human rights issues in West Papua as it did occur in 1995 in dealing with the Timika Case and with East Timor problems.

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