

Statement by Churches in West Papua calling for military to leave region



Greetings from Papua,

We are writing as leaders of the Church in Papua to appeal to you for your urgent help in raising awareness about the current deteriorating security and human rights situation in our land.

The last two weeks has seen an escalation in the conflict here. It initially ignited from an incident of racial abuse directed at Papuan students who were students on the Island of Java in Central Indonesia. This incident mobilised thousands of Papuans to gather and join peaceful demonstrations in towns and cities across Papua. However, there have also been some small breakaway groups that have burnt and destroyed property in protest. The Government of Indonesia then responded with disproportionate aggression by militarising the island and allowing armed civil militia groups to be active on the streets.

The situation is extremely critical, and we believe that urgent international intervention is needed to help protect the Papuan people from the escalating violence.

Our aim in this document is to outline the current situation in Papua, as well as offer the context of injustice and conflict facing our communities. We also proffer a specific appeal to the international community, for solidarity and also to action to stand alongside the Papuan People in their call for justice and peace in the land of Papua.

We offer context to this situation based on the Bible text above and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination ratified by the Republic of Indonesia:

1. Racial Discrimination: The recent occurrence of racial discrimination against Papuan students in Surabaya, Malang, Semarang and Makassar is a repetition of racism and discrimination experienced by indigenous Papuans since Papua was integrated into the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia.

2. Excessive Military Force: The excessive deployment of thousands of army and police from other areas of Indonesia, in response to the peaceful mass demonstrations of the Papuan people is causing widespread fear and trauma in communities across Papua.

3. Arrests and Violence: Mass actions and protests against racism in various cities in Papua have been met with arrests and violent countermeasures by red and white militias supported by Indonesian security forces. This shows a clear intention to create horizontal conflict in the heart of Papuan society.

4. Injustice: In the city of Deiyai, at least 8 civilians and one policeman were killed when the police turned their guns on a peaceful protest. This shows a complete lack of restraint or respect for the right to peacefully protest in the face of racism and injustice. Since then the government has tried to cover up these killings and refuses to release the names of civilian victims.

5. Humanitarian Crisis: Military operations in Nduga since December 2018 have totally isolated the area preventing humanitarian assistance from reaching desperate communities. The militarisation of and the severe humanitarian situation of Nduga communities and refugees, illustrates the utter lack of integrity from the government. On April 1, 2019 at the Swissbel Hotel in the city of Jayapura, the President promised to withdraw military forces from Nduga. However, as of today no action resembling this promise, has been taken. This further demonstrates to the world, that the Indonesian government does not

care about, and is not serious concerning dealing with the critical humanitarian situation in Papua.

6. Severing Access to Communication and Information: The internet network for personal mobile users throughout Papua remains inaccessible due to it being blocked on August 20th 2019. This action also limits the ability of Papuan Journalists to carry out their duties and therefore violates the community's right to information and freedom of expression.

7. Human Rights Violations: There are still many unresolved cases of human rights violations in Tanah Papua such as bloody Biak, bloody Wasior, bloody Wamena, bloody Abepura, Bloody Paniai. None of these have been properly investigated by authorities and to date there have been no prosecutions. This shows an extreme neglect and lack of interest on behalf of the state to resolve any of these situations justly or to look after the rights of indigenous Papuans.

On 26 of August 2019, The Ecumenical Forum wrote a pastoral appeal outlining our concerns above and presented it to government, police and military representatives. To date we have received no response.

In the days since we released the initial appeal, the following events have taken place:

1. Troops Deployed: The demonstrations carried out by the Papuan people to oppose incidents and attitudes of racism were met with an extreme overreaction from the Indonesian Government. They have, to date, now sent almost 6000 troops to Papua. As of the 3rd September there is an armed soldier or armed police officer every 100 meters on the streets of Papuan cities.

Subsequently, the National Chief of Police (KAPOLRI) and the Indonesian Army Commander (Panglima TNI) have arrived in Papua and set up a control center in Jayapura, the capital of Papua Province. At 4pm on 3rd September, military intelligence entered the Synod office of one of the main indigenous Papuan churches – the Gospel Tabernacle Church of Papua (Kingmi Papua), and intimidated and terrorised the church staff who were present.

2. Restricted/Unsafe Travel: From the 30th August to the 2nd September, the main street between Entrop to Jayapura, (an area inhabited by a majority of people who call themselves “Warga Nusantara” or “Citizens of the Archipelago”), was taken over by local residents armed with sharp instruments who started to restrict access to the road and check all vehicles that pass this route. This attitude and action has made the Papuan people feel very unsafe when travelling through this area.

3. Increased Violence and Killings: There have been increased killings and violence towards civilians including that of Evert Mohu (22 years old) who was killed on 30th August 2019 and Maikel Kareth (21 years old) who was killed on 1st September 2019. Pastor Daud Aulwe and 7 other people experienced severe injuries after they were dragged from their vehicle on 30th August by civil militia and badly beaten. Their car was then set alight. Attacks on local people in Apepura, and students of the Nayak hostel have resulted in severe wounds and many involved are now in a serious condition in hospital. Laus Rumayom, a professor in the University of Cenderawasih and Abetius Wenda, a medical student were also stabbed in another altercation. All of these acts of violence were carried out by the Nusantara civil militia group, the members of which, are migrants from other parts of Indonesia.

4. Public Services in Crisis: We are currently experiencing a complete breakdown of public services across every sector: Supplies of cooking fuel have run dry and there are long queues everywhere to obtain basic goods and food. Shops and markets have closed, causing difficulties for the local population in getting basic living supplies. Electricity is cut for long periods every day and banks and ATM points have been closed. Schools, universities, colleges and government and private offices are shut. These restrictions to food, education, money and ability to communicate make life exceptionally difficult. In addition, any legal accompaniment to those that have been arrested by the police has been restricted.

5. Lack of Transparency by The State: Wiranto the Minister for Political Legal and Security Affairs has accused Benny Wendy, the leader of ULMWP as the person who is behind the demonstrations. This stance by the state aims to bury the real roots of the very issues that Papuan people are demonstrating against.

Observing the above developments, we are forced to conclude that we are experiencing a critical situation of both direct and structural violence in Papua. The historical and ongoing systematic and long-term oppression, racism and impunity continues to have a serious impact on our people, causing us to suffer low self-esteem and social and moral disorientation, with devastating impact on our communities.

We are desperately concerned for our safety and the safety of our people. Human rights violations are nothing new in Papua, but we are observing exceptionally dangerous tendencies taking place at this time in addition to a significant risk of a rapid escalation of violence. The Government of Indonesia continues to call for peace, but we believe that there cannot be real peace in Papua without justice. Justice must take place for sustainable, lasting peace to be established. Without justice there will simply be 'peace in name only' which

will only serve to keep Papuans trapped in the current cycle of oppression and violence.

For this reason, we the Church leaders in the Land of Papua appeal to Indigenous Communities around the world, The Christian Church and National Governments to carry out the following actions:

1. Call for the Government of Indonesia to withdraw their military troops, including those that are present in the area of Nduga and other areas across Papua.
2. Call for the Government of Indonesia to hold a dignified and peaceful Dialogue facilitated by a neutral third party, with The United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULMWP) on the future of Papua. The main objective of this should be to move towards a permanent positive peace in the land of Papua which has long been the hope of the people of Papua (since 1961), so that our children and grandchildren do not experience the oppression, pain and suffering that we have lived through.
3. Call for the UN Commissioner for Human Rights to urgently visit Papua to investigate the human rights situation.
4. Mobilise your communities to pray and stand in solidarity with the people of Papua and put pressure on your political leaders to act on the call to action mentioned above.

With Respect,

Signed by Church Leaders in Papua (Ecumenical Forum of Churches in Papua),

Jayapura 4 September 2019,

Members of Ecumenical Forum of Churches in Papua