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Canadians Call for Action on Violence in West Papua

Victoria, BC, October 7, 2019. As Indonesian state violence mounts against protesters in West Papua, concerned Canadians are calling for pressure on the Indonesian government to halt repression and take steps against racism in the Pacific island territory.

West Papua was slated for independence until Indonesia took over in the 1960s and annexed it. Independence protests continue in this island, home to some of the world's largest remaining rain forests and richest biological and cultural diversity.

In recent months, Indonesia's treatment of West Papuans has deteriorated to the worst it has been in the last two decades, sparked by racist attacks on Papuans who have been called "monkeys". In late September, at least 27 Papuans were killed by Indonesian government forces in response to West Papuans calling for their rights and at least 70 people have been injured. The Indonesian government has deployed over 1,000 security personnel to West Papua, cut internet access and banned journalists and human rights organizations from entering the area. Scores of peaceful protesters have been arrested. More than 22 are facing prosecution for *Makar* (treason) for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly. They are considered 'prisoners of conscience' by Amnesty International.

"International pressure needs to be applied against Indonesia now to safeguard the lives and rights of West Papuans," said April Ingham, Executive Director of Pacific Peoples' Partnership, a Victoria-based advocacy organization with more than 40 years of experience working for human rights and the environment in Canada and the South Pacific. "Canada, which claims a strong tradition as an advocate of human rights, should take a stand in support of West Papuans and pressure the Indonesian government to allow for freedom of expression, association and assembly and the right of self-determination for West Papuan peoples."

Recommendations:

- Pressure the Indonesian government to allow for freedom of expression, association and assembly and the right to self-determination for West Papuans;
- Pressure the Indonesian government to immediately release the 22 prisoners' of conscience and drop the *Makar* charges;
- Pressure the Indonesian government to allow for access to West Papua for journalists and human rights organizations, and
- Pressure the Indonesian government to investigate military and police engaging in human rights abuses.

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West Papua Backgrounder

Indonesia maintains control over West Papua, using military might to silence demands for self-determination and denying the Indigenous people their fundamental human rights. Since its invasion in 1963, an estimated 100,000 Papuans (about 15% of the population) have been killed by Indonesian armed forces and militias.

In 2019, West Papua burst back into the headlines after Indonesians in Surabaya attacked and called Papuan students “monkeys”. A wave of anti-racist protest erupted and revived independence sentiments throughout West Papua. The Indonesian army has escalated its repressive measures in response. Racism, rights, resources and rainforests intersect in this complex conflict.

Where is it? West Papua, located to the north of Australia, is blanketed with tropical rainforests. These are rich in biodiversity and represent the largest remaining untouched rainforests in Asia. But more than three quarters of the 40 million hectares of forest have been designated for logging or mining. Resource revenues support continued military oppression.



A History of Betrayal

1945- The Dutch East Indies, excluding Papua, becomes the Republic of Indonesia. **1961-** Papuans celebrate their “Independence Day” by raising the Morning Star flag. **1963-** Indonesian troops take over Papua. **1969-** Indonesia holds a “popular consultation” over Papua’s future. 1,000 representatives are forced to vote openly in front of armed soldiers, and told they would be shot unless the vote supported integration with Indonesia. **2001-** An autonomy deal grants Papua increased control of its resources and the freedom to express its cultural identity. **2003-** The Indonesian army begins a campaign of terror in the highlands, burning villages and torturing detainees. Indonesia bans all foreign journalists in Papua. **2005-** After the Government of Indonesia fails to implement the autonomy agreement, the People's Assembly of Papua formally returns it to Jakarta demanding a real solution be negotiated. **2014-** At a meeting in Vanuatu, Papuan independence groups unite to form the United Liberation Movement of West Papua and start to gain support from Pacific Island states. **2019-** Racial tensions flare into the open and the largest pro-independence protests to date are met with force and arrests of activists.

50 Years of Racism

The Indigenous peoples of West Papua are Melanesians, related to the people of Papua New Guinea and many Pacific island countries. Their independence claims have often rested on being a Pacific, not an Indonesian, people. Papuans have been victims of racism and other forms of discrimination for more than half a century, and dismissed as “Stone Age” peoples who are “ignorant” and need to be “civilized.” Racism is the daily lived reality for many Papuans. In 2019, Papuan students continue their demand for racism to end.

Human Rights Abuses and Injustice

- The Indonesian government has relocated thousands of Indonesians to Papua through the “transmigration” program, initially supported by the World Bank and Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). Over 40% of Papua’s two million people are settlers from Indonesia. West Papua’s Indigenous cultures and 274 distinct languages are at risk.

Human Rights Abuses and Injustice continued

- Indonesian security forces regularly use torture, extra-judicial killings and forced detention to block Papuans from protecting their lands and expressing their right to self-determination.
- Human rights defenders and community leaders are routinely harassed, and intimidated or murdered.
- Despite ample evidence of atrocities, only once has a military official been charged for human rights violations committed against Papuan people.
- Papuan women are often sexually assaulted by the military and are denied access to health services, resulting in Papua having the highest HIV rates in Indonesia.
- The territory is mostly closed to outsiders, and in 2019 the government shut down the Internet. The UN Commissioner for Human Rights is the most recent to express concern.

Environmental Destruction

West Papua is home to some of the largest remaining rainforest in Southeast Asia. It is rich in natural resources including natural gas, oil and minerals. The military is directly involved, engaging in illegal logging and acting as security for mining companies. Papua is home to the highest concentration of illegal logging operations in Asia.

Widespread logging and mining have had a serious impact on the livelihood and traditions of the Papuan people who rely on the land for survival. Traditional land is continually being cleared, creating conflict among Indigenous people, foreign companies and Indonesian security forces. Forest is being cleared to make way for mono-crop agriculture in an effort to gain environmental certification, without regard to Indigenous peoples or the negative effect on old-growth forests.

Take Action

Write to Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland to ask her to put pressure on the Indonesian government to stop the killings, torture and arrests, and support freedom of choice in West Papua. 125 Sussex Drive (no stamp necessary), Ottawa ON, K1A 0A6, Chrystia.Freeland@parl.gc.ca

Join a Canadian based working committee to learn more about this ongoing human rights crisis and get involved in advocacy and solutions based responses. Email: info@pacificpeoplespartnership.org

Donate to, or get involved with the Pacific Peoples' Partnership, the main Canadian organization working on Papuan Indigenous rights. <http://pacificpeoplespartnership.org>

About Pacific Peoples' Partnership

For over forty four years, Pacific Peoples' Partnership has supported the aspirations of South Pacific Islanders and Indigenous peoples for peace, environmental sustainability, social justice and community development.

Based on Lekwungen territories in Victoria BC, Canada, we are Canada's only non-profit organization and registered charity focused specifically on the island nations of the South Pacific.

www.pacificpeoplespartnership.org