

West Papua: 40-year struggle for justice and self-determination

**Presentation by
Jacob Rumbiak and Harry Wainggai**

Asia-Pacific Mediation Forum Conference, Adelaide, 29 November – 1 December 2001

Important dates in West Papua's colonial history

1883 - West Papua became a Dutch colony

1949 - Former Dutch East Indies became the independent nation of Indonesia (West Papua not included, Dutch wanted it to become independent)

1950s - Dutch, with Australian support, prepared West Papua for independence

1949-1961 - Sukarno agitated for West Papua to become part of Indonesia

1961, 1st December - First raising of West Papuan Morning Star flag and singing of national anthem

1961, 19th December - Indonesian military invasion begins (some troops had entered secretly in 1960)

1962 - Under pressure from United States, Dutch sign New York agreement with Indonesia. West Papua handed to Indonesia, with act of self-determination to occur in 6 years

1969 - so-called 'Act of Free Choice', 1025 Papuans under severe duress, agree to remain part of Indonesia. UN sanctions this vote. Australia prevents two Papuans from flying out of PNG to report intimidation to the United Nations.

2000 - May/June Papuan Congress held. Pledge to pursue peaceful path to self-determination.

2001, November - two UN officials involved in supervising the Act of Free Choice, publicly declare the process was a 'sham'.

12 years of non-violent struggle

Jacob:

We Papuans have been involved in a struggle for our right to self-determination and justice for 40 years. Churches estimate that 400,000 people have been killed or disappeared since 1961.

From 1964 to 1987 our struggle was an armed one against the Indonesian military colonizers. In the 1980's our great cultural leader and academic Dr Thomas Wainggai taught us about non-violent strategies. In 1988 meetings were held across West Papua. We decided to adopt Dr Wainggai's peaceful methods. Dr Wainggai died mysteriously in jail in 1996.

Our non-violent struggle has survived for 12 years, despite horrible crimes by the Indonesian military against even women and young children. Through all their intimidation we have remained strong.

Many of our leaders have been killed over the years. Three weeks ago another of our leaders was killed by the Indonesian military. They want to destroy our non-violent struggle by trying to provoke us to violence. Despite barbarous acts of intimidation by Indonesian military, including murder, rape,

torture, detention and destruction of entire villages, the non-violent struggle has continued for 12 years - we have remained strong.

I took part in the armed struggle against the Indonesian soldiers until 1982 when Dr Wainggai taught me about non-violent strategies. I realised that the problem was not the Indonesian soldiers, it was the Indonesian government's colonial policies. The best way to change these policies is talk to the government.

I looked at Indonesia and the Dutch who fought each other for 350 years, but when Indonesia became independent they stopped being enemies. The same will be true for Indonesia and West Papua.

I thought the future for peace and justice in West Papua was with the young people, so I started to work with students and young people in West Papua and other parts of Indonesia and the Pacific.

We have set up two important student and youth groups. The FKMPB for students in West Papua and WESTPANYAT, for students and young people across Indonesia and in South Pacific countries.

The groups want to advance peace and justice by educating people about Melanesian culture and identity, health, human rights, democracy and law.

Students and young people join the struggle

Harry:

In 1994 WESPANYAT was a small organization of seven members. It now has eighteen thousand members who work throughout Indonesia, and Melanesia - including Papua New Guinea, Bougainville, the Solomons, Fiji, Vanuatu and Kanaki - raising awareness about Melanesian cultures, identity, and beliefs.

WESTPANYAT educates the Indonesian people to know and to understand West Papuan human rights, their human dignity, their natural cultures and West Papuan identity. It encourages Indonesians to appreciate that West Papuans want to build their own country, and are capable of running an independent nation.

WESTPANYAT educates the West Papuan people to know and understand their human rights, their dignity, their cultures, and the law; and to believe in the value of their natural resources as the basis for health and survival.

WESTPANYAT members educate their Melanesian kin in the Pacific to be responsible for protecting their human rights, their dignity, their land rights and their identity. They encourage them to believe that their Melanesian ancestors did not depend on others to survive, and were therefore not controlled by foreigners.

WESPANYAT has an important program which is based on knowing, understanding and respecting each other. Its members work hard to create peace in the region through non-violent methods.

It's time for international action

Jacob:

We Papuans have tried for 12 years to bring a peaceful solution to the problems in West Papua. Things are critical now. We know that no matter how hard we try to work with them, the Indonesian government cannot be trusted.

They have promised special autonomy for 2 years now, but still it is not in place. We did not ask for autonomy, we ask for a referendum to decide our own future.

They have told the world the military is not committing acts of violence against us, but still they do.

I would like to read a quote from the *Sydney Morning Herald's* Editorial of 19 November this year:

“When the path of peaceful negotiation proves as perilous as that of guerrilla warfare there seems little to do but walk away from the negotiating table. The wrecking of delicate negotiations over the status of Indonesia's contested province of Irian Jaya - also known as West Papua - appears to be the aim of those who kidnapped and murdered the popular leader of the pro-independence movement, Theys Eluay.”

What happens next depends on Australia and the rest of the international community. You can turn your backs on our struggle, and watch as conflict engulfs West Papua OR you can support and encourage a peaceful solution.

Actions for Australia and the international community

The time for action is now. The international community must call on the Indonesian government to urgently:

- set up an independent commission, composed of persons of integrity, including Papuans, to investigate the murder of Chief Eluay and the continuing acts of violence by security forces
- cease all acts of intimidation by security forces and drastically reduce their numbers
- permit a United Nations team to enter the province to investigate and monitor the human rights situation
- resume high-level talks with Papuan leaders with the aim of setting a timeline for a genuine act of self-determination.

If Indonesia refuses to carry out these peace-making actions, a United Nations peace-keeping force must be sent to West Papua, with or without Indonesia's permission, to bring an end to the abuses and conduct a referendum