

West Papua the forgotten Pacific country

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Since 1963 more than 100,000 West Papuans have been killed; more than 15,000 West Papuans are currently living in camps in Papua New Guinea; and others are forced to live in exile around the world because it is not safe for them to go home.

The Indonesian government's transmigration programme has resulted in around one million non-Papuan transmigrants being moved into West Papua.

Multi-national corporations in cahoots with the Indonesian authorities have exploited West Papua's natural resources to an extraordinary degree. This has caused massive social dislocation, devastation of rainforests, and pollution of streams and rivers on which the local people depend for their survival.

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There has been an increase in the scale and intensity of Indonesian military operations. As but one example, an operation in late 2004 in the Puncak Jaya area resulted in at least 5,000 local people fleeing into the mountains in fear as their villages and crops were destroyed. They remain in hiding with scant food supplies and vulnerable to the cold, 60 have already died. No international observers nor representatives of humanitarian organisations have been permitted to visit the area.

The Indonesian authorities have talked about giving West Papua 'special autonomy' but this is not supported by the West Papuans who want to determine their own future. The Indonesian administration is currently dividing West Papua into provinces, designed to give them more military control, indicating that the 'special autonomy' proposal is essentially meaningless. Last year, Indonesia's Constitutional Court ruled that the decision to partition West Papua is unlawful, but did not reverse the decision on the grounds that their ruling could not be retroactively applied.

The West Papuans have developed an initiative to establish Papua as a Zone of Peace, and have called for dialogue with Jakarta to discuss the future status of West Papua. Their calls have been ignored. Instead of dialogue, there is an increase in the level of violent repression by Indonesian armed forces, and they are now creating armed militias, similar to what they did in East Timor.

Everyone knows the outcome of the lack of action by the world community for the people of East Timor, the final wanton terror and destruction by the Indonesian armed forces and their militias in 1999. It is the responsibility of the New Zealand and other Pacific governments to act now to ensure that the people of West Papua do not have the same fate inflicted on them.

For more information about West Papua, and how you can help, see <http://www.converge.org.nz/pma/wpapua.htm>



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