

PAPER NAME

Papua-political review-2021.pdf

WORD COUNT

4344 Words

CHARACTER COUNT

24800 Characters

PAGE COUNT

9 Pages

FILE SIZE

217.5KB

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Oct 17, 2022 11:06 PM GMT+7

REPORT DATE

Oct 17, 2022 11:07 PM GMT+7

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PAPUA

To mark the 2020 International Human Rights Day in Papua, 147 Catholic priests of Papua released a moral appeal to all parties involved in Papua's conflict, including church leaders, the government, the security apparatus, investors, and the ³⁵ Majelis Rakyat Papua (Papuan People's Council), as well as the Tentara Pembebasan Nasional Papua Barat (TPNPB, West Papua National Liberation Army). They urged ²⁰ these parties to uphold dialogue in order to stop violence across Papua. At the end of the appeal, the priests stressed: "We, the priests of Papua, agree and strongly offer an approach of dialogue. This approach becomes a new and dignified policy to develop a stable, just, peaceful, and prosperous Papua. At the same time, [we] categorically reject and condemn violent acts in this land" (Pastor Katolik Papua 2020; translation mine).

It is important to note the use of the word "condemn," which is quite unusual for a document from the Catholic hierarchy. The statement sums up the general concern of the Papuan public. On the one hand, it expresses a sense of frustration, anger, and desperation at the protracted violence that has caused the loss of so many lives in Papua, especially in the Central Highlands. On the other, it reflects the priests' determination and hope to address the protracted conflict in a peaceful way. Their optimism remains strong. "It is the way to remind the government that they need to hold a dialogue with Papua as *the* way to address the conflict," said Fr John Bunay, the New Coordinator of Jaringan Damai Papua (Papua

Peace Network) (pers comm, 3 March 2021).

If we look back to the frequency of security incidents in the Central Highlands of Papua in 2019, at least thirty such incidents occurred in the districts of Nduga, Puncak, Intan Jaya, and Mimika. Therefore, the priests' concerns are justified. Since the killing of road workers at the end of 2018 (Hernawan 2019, 536), the activities of the TPNPB have increased exponentially. No longer limited to the district of Nduga, they have expanded to the neighboring districts. Eleven TPNPB groups actively operate in these districts and have territorial control in various areas within them.

This situation also means a significant increase in the operations of the Tentara Nasional Indonesia (the Indonesian national military), which has been deployed to hunt down the TPNPB. Joint forces of the military and the police have frequently engaged the TPNPB in these districts, leaving casualties on both sides. Those bearing weapons also target civilians. As a result, the local residents have been caught in the ongoing armed conflict, which has forced many to leave their homes and take refuge outside of their home districts. Some of them have managed to go to other towns as far as Nabire, Enarotali, or Timika, while others have scattered throughout the bush or are unaccounted for. Schools, markets, local government offices, and airstrips have been closed for months.

The situation in Intan Jaya in particular became worse in the second part of the year when three church workers were either killed or wounded. The first case was the killing of Rev Yeremia Zanambani,

who was found dead in his pig stall on 19 September 2020. The second case occurred on 7 October 2020, when Agustinus Duwitau, a Catholic Church worker, was shot and wounded (Lantipo 2020). A witness told the media that Duwitau was carrying an air rifle for hunting, so the security forces might have thought he was a member of the TPNPB. The incident occurred when the Papuan Provincial Council's task force was about to leave the Sugapa airstrip, so they were not able to handle it. The third case happened on 26 October 2020, when Rufinus Tigau, a Catholic catechist, was shot dead by the army in his own yard and was buried without permission from his family (Mambor 2020). He was accused of being a member of the TPNPB, which Fr Martin Kuayo, the apostolic administrator of the Diocese of Timika, categorically denied. In his media statement (Dagur 2020), Fr Kuayo clarified that Tigau had been the assistant of the parish priest of Bilogai and had played an important role in church services.

The series of violent acts, especially the killing of Rev Zanambani, prompted four institutions to conduct independent investigations. The Coordinating Ministry for Security, Political and Legal Affairs established a joint fact-finding team, Tim Gabungan Pencari Fakta (TGPF), for Intan Jaya; the governor of Papua established Tim Kemanusiaan untuk Intan Jaya (the Humanitarian Team for Intan Jaya); and the Papua Provincial Council deployed Pansus untuk Intan Jaya (Special Taskforce for Intan Jaya). Komnas HAM (the Indonesian National Commission on Human Rights), however, did not establish a

special team, instead sending its regular investigation team. Independently, each team released a conclusion that found the same pattern of direct involvement of the Indonesian army in the pastor's killing. Komnas HAM categorizes the act as an extrajudicial killing (Komnas HAM 2020).

Only two of the teams, Komnas HAM (2020) and the Humanitarian Team for Intan Jaya (2020), specifically identified the main suspect, Sergeant Alpius Hasim Madi, the deputy commander of the subdistrict military command (Koramil) of Hita-dipa. Komnas HAM found detailed evidence showing that the suspect had tortured the victim before executing him. Both Komnas HAM and TGPF separately recommended that the government hold pengadilan koneksitas, a joint civil and martial court, to hear the case since it involves both civilian and military personnel. To date, however, there has been no sign that the government will implement the recommendation.

Whereas the case of Rev Zanambani has been investigated and remains pending of a court hearing, there has been no investigation into the other cases whatsoever. We can suspect the reasons behind it: (1) the two other victims are not as prominent as Rev Zanambani, and (2) unlike the Indonesian Council of Churches, which made an appeal to the president to undertake a thorough investigation, the Catholic Church only minimally pressured the relevant authorities to take action. Fr Kuayo dismissed the accusation made by the police and the army, but he did not appeal for judicial investigation into the case. Similarly, the bishops of Papua did

not request an investigation into any specific cases when they met with Coordinating Minister for Security, Political and Legal Affairs Mahmud MD. Instead, they discussed the more general issue of resolving conflict in Papua (Watkins 2020).

The three cases are central to understanding the impact of the conflict in the Central Highlands not only on the local residents but, more importantly, on the broader social and political landscape of Papua. The role of the church in the remote parts of Papua is significant. Beginning in the Dutch colonial period, churches of various denominations were the pioneers of the development of Papua's interior, building infrastructure such as airstrips and local roads to connect it with the outside world. The churches were also the first providers of basic services, especially agriculture, education, and health services. This historical legacy has cemented trust and a strong relationship between churches and indigenous Papuans across the Central Highlands. At the same time, the church has become part of Papuans' identity. Therefore, when they witnessed their church workers being targeted, they had no choice but to leave their homes because they believed that their ultimate safeguard had been destroyed.

From Intan Jaya District, the Diocese of Timika reported that hundreds of internally displaced persons have taken refuge in the St Misael Parish of Bilogai, with minimal humanitarian assistance. The parish priest, Fr Yustinus Rahangiar, has been trying to cope with the multiple burdens of dealing with internally displaced persons. On the one hand, he has to deal with

armed men, and on the other, he has to attend to the humanitarian needs of hundreds of people.

The problem of internally displaced persons is not novel to Papua. We learned from the Nduga conflict that the outflux of internally displaced persons to other districts has increased significantly in the last three years (Hernawan 2020, 579–80). The 2020 joint report of the [Foundation for Justice and Integrity of the Papuan People](#); the [Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Desk of the Papuan Tabernacle Church](#); the [Papuan Institute for Human Rights Study and Advocacy](#); and the International Coalition for Papua documents at least 41,851 internally displaced persons in the five districts from August 2019 to April 2020. These individuals live in dire conditions, such as overcrowded temporary shelters or relatives' homes. They suffer from malnutrition, sickness, exhaustion, and hypothermia; as a result, some 214 internally displaced persons died in 2019.

The ongoing armed violence has prompted the solidarity movement for Papua to push for a change for the better in Papua. At the national level, the movement gained significant victories in two legal cases that could create precedents for the future. The first victory was that of the so-called [Balikpapan seven](#)—Fery Gombo, [Alexander Gobay](#), [Hengki Hilapok](#), [Buchtar Tabuni](#), [Irwanus Uropmabin](#), [Stevanus Itlay](#), and [Agus Kossay](#)—who had been charged with treason for organizing a rally to protest racial discrimination against Papuans in Jayapura in 2019. Although the alleged crime took place in Jayapura, the court hearing was moved to Balikpapan,

without the inditees' permission, at the insistence of the Papua police, who argued that there were risks in Jayapura that would jeopardize the trial.

Despite the long distance and difficult communication, the alliance between civil society organizations in Jayapura and Balikpapan managed to establish an effective collaboration to put pressure on the government and the judges to release the inditees. While the prosecutors had asked for long prison sentences, on 17 June 2020, the judges sentenced the inditees to eleven-months of imprisonment, which was quite unexpected (Firdaus 2020). The lenient sentence cannot be separated from strong public pressure from the Papuan Provincial Council, the Papuan People's Council, Catholic priests, and other religious leaders of Papua (ICP 2020b), which also coincided with the global Black Lives Matter campaign.

The second victory was the lawsuit submitted by Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Pers (Legal Aid for Press), [Alliance of Independent Journalists](#), [Layasan Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Indonesia](#) (Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation), and Safenet against the president of Indonesia and the minister of information regarding the Internet shutdown in Papua during the protest against racist attacks on Papuan students from August to September 2019. On 3 June 2020, the [Jakarta State Administrative Court](#) ruled that the president and the minister of information had acted unlawfully in approving the shutdown (Adjie 2020). The verdict was quite unexpected, as there was no precedent for the state losing a court battle that involved Papua. The

ruling also established that the Indonesian administration not only uses security forces and the law to suppress Papuan activism but also shuts down the Internet to prevent Papuan activists from communicating with the outside world.

In another court hearing, however, the Indonesian students' show of solidarity for Papua lost one battle. Four students from Khairun University in Ternate (the capital of North Maluku Province) were expelled from their campus for joining the rally on 2 December 2019, which called on the government to release Papuan political prisoners and grant Papuan self-determination (Blades 2020). The university claimed that the students had committed treason by joining the rally. Indonesian rights groups, such as Human Rights Watch, argued that the university should support academic freedom and freedom of expression, as the students had expressed their views peacefully.

The students were members of the Front of Indonesian People for West Papua (FRI-WP), which campaigns for Papua's self-determination—a rather uncommon agenda for solidarity movements for Papua. Both national and international rights groups tend to focus on the human rights agenda and keep their distance when it comes to Papuan self-determination, as they believe it belongs to the realm of politics, not human rights. Therefore, FRI-WP is quite unique in the current landscape. The chair of FRI-WP, Surya Anta, was jailed for leading a rally by raising the Papuan flag in front of the State Palace on 28 August 2019 (Hernawan 2020), so it was not too surprising to see FRI-WP members launching the same campaign. Another

interesting element was the location, Ternate. While geographically it is closer to Papua than to Jakarta, the city is not known for activism.

While the armed conflict hit the Central Highlands, the heated debate over the extension of Special Autonomy (Otsus) funds preoccupied the urban centers. A movement of twenty-nine organizations in Papua launched a petition of the Papuan people against the second stage of Special Autonomy (Otsus II) on 22 July 2020 in the office of the Dewan Adat Papua (the Papuan Customary Council). In a YouTube message on 26 November 2020, Viktor Yeimo, the spokesperson of Parlemen Rakyat Papua (Parliament of the Papuan People), stressed that “the Papuan people from almost all components in Papua have supported the Petition against Otsus. They have conveyed it through seminars, webinars and other activities that 19 years of special autonomy in West Papua has failed to bring upon protection and empowerment for Papuans” (quoted in ICP 2020d). He explained that 102 organizations had already signed the petition, which lists the following demands:

- 1 All West Papuans, inside and outside of West Papua, shall not be provoked by Indonesia's polarizing politics and manipulative development projects in West Papua;
- 2 All West Papuans, inside and outside of West Papua, shall support the Petition against Otsus II for the democratic consolidation of unity;
- 3 All Papuans shall continue with the mobilisation for the implementation of a peaceful national civil strike in support for the right to self-determination;

4 The Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSP), Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), African Caribbean Pacific (ACP) and the United Nations shall immediately monitor and urge Indonesia to allow the realisation of the right to self-determination for the Papuan people. (ICP 2020d)

The response to Otsus II has not been limited to Papuan activists. The Papuan People's Council (MRP) issued a plan to hold public consultations in both provinces (Papua and West Papua, the latter having been split in 2003) on 17 and 18 November 2020 to collect feedback from the Papuan people. The plan immediately met with a response from the Papua chief of police, Paulus Waterpauw, who issued a decree banning such gatherings on the grounds of preventing Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) (ICP 2020a).

In the end, the public consultations did not work well. In Wamena, a group of Papuans blocked the Wamena airport for six hours, so the MRP team was forced to cancel the plan for consultation on 15 November and returned to Jayapura the same day (Fadhilah 2020). In Merauke, the police raided the public consultation held on 18 November and arrested fifty-four people for breaching health protocols for the prevention of COVID-19 (Suwandi 2020); meanwhile, other groups held a rally in the city opposing the consultation (Merauke 2020). A consultation planned for the district of Dogiyai was also canceled, but hundreds of Papuans gathered on 17 November to voice their rejection of the revision of the Special Autonomy Law.

During the public consultation in Raja Ampat in August 2020, the

19 People's Council of West Papua Province (MRPB) received a clear message from the various Papuan groups who rejected the revision of Otsus since they did not enjoy the benefits of the law (Media Corruption Watch 2020). The chair of the MRPB, Maxsi Nelson Ahoren, publicly warned the government and the provincial council of West Papua Province not to act on their own initiatives but instead to listen to the people's aspirations: "The creation of new administration (pemekaran) and the increase of the budget for the West Papua Province will never satisfy the people who demand justice" (Kapisa 2021).

Similarly, the residents of Nabire and Timika took to the streets on 23 and 24 September to express their objection to Otsus II, and the police responded with mass arrests (ICP 2020c). In Manado, on 21 September, Papuan students organized a rally to launch the petition against the Special Autonomy Law and to demand self-determination. The police placed roadblocks and used tear gas to disburse the rally (ICP 2020e). The geographical spread shows that this was not an isolated incident.

The position of the central government was clear. Mahfud MD stated that there would be no revision of Otsus except for an extension of its special budget period, whereas the chair of the national Parliament, Bambang Susatyo, supported the idea of creating new provinces and splitting Papua into five (Saputro 2020). This idea is strongly opposed by most Papuan actors.

Together, the opposing groups, the involvement of the MRP in both provinces, the police intervention, and the statements by the national elite

already demonstrate that the revision of Otsus is a highly politicized issue. It is no longer simply a matter of revising a law. On the contrary, it is all about perception of the law in relation to state sovereignty. For Papuans, the revision of the law has been perceived as an intrusion of the state into their sovereign lives, whereas for the state authorities, the law is the way the state governs Papua regardless of Papuans' perceptions.

Amid all of the divisions and oppositions, the Catholic priests' collective voice serves as a timely reminder to all stakeholders to refrain from using violence and instead resort to dialogue. Their concerns might also relate to the internal dynamics within the churches in Papua, where division also prevails. Four major denominations—Gereja Kristen Injil (Evangelical Christian Church); Kingmi (Gereja Kemah Injil, or Tabernacle Church); Gereja Injil di Indonesia (Evangelical Church in Indonesia); and Baptist—established the West Papua Council of Churches (WPCC) on 31 January 2020 as a separate umbrella from the existing ecumenical Council of Churches of Papua, which includes all Christian denominations, including the Roman Catholic Church. Members of the WPCC have since become members of the Pacific Council of Churches (PCC). In a YouTube message posted on 28 October, Rev Socrates Sofyan Yoman emphasized that “by joining PCC, they return to their original home, namely the Churches of Melanesia” (Suara Mambruk Papua 2020). He called the WPCC “a new home, a new honai for Papuans” that will provide protection. The question remains whether the new home will be

inclusive enough to cover all Christian denominations.

Within the Catholic community in Papua, there have been ongoing concerns over the silence of Papua's bishops regarding the protracted conflict. One of the Papuan priests who signed the moral appeal acknowledged that it was difficult for him to have a dialogue with the bishop of Jayapura to discuss the priests' statement. “But we receive support from the Bishops of Agats and Sorong,” he said. This internal problem has become a public issue since it directly contributes to the divisions among the Papuan churches. Unlike in the 1990s and 2000s, the churches are no longer united in one front to advocate for social justice and human rights for Papuans. This may undermine not only their effectiveness but, more importantly, the call for justice for Papuans.

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PAPUA NEW GUINEA

The year 2020 brought great challenges worldwide with the global pandemic of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), and while many parts of the Pacific region were able to remain free of the virus and its variants, Papua New Guinea (PNG) was not able to stay the tide. Coupled with this threat were government efforts to deal with a stumbling economy, breakdowns in negotiations regarding the distribution of profits from extractive industries, and grave political infighting. Faced with such stern challenges, the country was able to navigate a path through, even passing two important anti-corruption laws, although it certainly was not unscathed.

The COVID-19 pandemic heavily disrupted an already strained health-care system in PNG. The structure and capacity of health-care provision in both rural and urban parts of PNG have always been tenuous, with major challenges in procuring needed supplies, medicines, and trained staff. These common shortcomings combined with the added stress of a pandemic turned out to be a recipe for disaster for a country that already struggles to address tuberculosis, polio, malaria, and other maladies within its borders. While the doc-

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