

Substantive root causes of contemporary conflicts involving minorities in West Papua

By Ms Rode Wanimbo

West Papua is located in the western part of the New Guinea island. It lies in the Pacific region, above the Continent of Australia. Due to its natural wealth, West Papua has, over the centuries, been targeted by foreign occupiers. Until 1963, we were colonized by the Dutch. Indonesia invaded West Papua in 1963. Since that very year, West Papuan and the Land of West Papua has been afflicted by conflict and violence that results in our suffering and prolonged human rights violation and natural destruction that continue to occur until today. In 1969, after a manipulative political act, we were transferred from the Dutch to Indonesia.

West Papuans have been viewed as primitive and uncivilised by the previous oppressors and by the Indonesian government. Due to the dominant culture, most of the Indonesian government policies in West Papua are migrant-bias, being designed for the benefits of the migrants instead of the local population. Papua Statistic Centre stated in 2020, the population of Indigenous West Papuans is about 2,3 million while the total population is 4,30 million.

The People and the Nature of West Papua had been experiencing systemic racism, structural injustices and violence as a result of colonialism. I identify four root causes of the conflict in West Papua. This is also based on my own experience and analysis.

First: Economic, and political interest for natural resources exploitation. Political conspiracy driven by economic interests have led to the human rights violation of the right to self-determination of the West Papuan. The USA wanted the wealth of Mount Nemangkawi so they conspired with the Indonesian government to obtain it. Mount Nemangkawi is located in Tembagapura where Freeport McMoran, the US-based company - the largest gold mining company - had been running the exploitation and the extraction. The Kennedy Administration initiated the New York Agreement in 1962 to facilitate the transfer of power over West Papua from the Netherlands to Indonesia. In 1967, two years before the UN sanctioned process of determining West Papuan's political status – Freeport McMoran signed a business contract with the Indonesian government to begin with a mining extraction project.

In 1969, instead of organizing a general referendum, the Indonesian government manipulated and intimidated the process of “the Act of Free Choice.” It went against the international democratic principle of one person, one vote. Unfortunately, to get rid of the problem of West Papua, the United Nations rubber stamped the process.

Second: the use of a security approach. Military operations in West Papua have been taking place since 1963 to today. After the manipulative political act, protests were raised and held in various forms at many different places. To silence the protests and resistances, the Indonesian government sent security forces which resulted in massive human rights violations in many other places. For Example, in 1977, there was a mass killing in my village named Kelela.

Approximately 150 people were buried alive. Many women experienced sexual violence. Two of my aunts were raped by members of the Indonesian Army.

In December 2018, there was an armed conflict between Indonesian security forces and the West Papua National Liberation Army named TPN-PB in Nduga, in the highland region of West Papua. This conflict caused the internal displacement (IDP) of thousands of people, mainly women and children. They fled to the jungle and surrounding regions. Until today, the IDPs in Nduga have been living in uncertainty for three years. Reverend Yeremias Zanambani was the tenth civilian victim shot dead in Intan Jaya, another highland region between October 2019 and December 2020.

In the midst of the covid-19 pandemic, the Indonesian government has forced its own citizens to leave their homes while they conduct military operations. I spent six days in Ilaga, Puncak Region in July 2021, where people are living in a war zone. West Papua Council of Churches are concerned about Indonesia security forces members continuing to use methods of warfare, which do not distinguish civilians to the TPN PB during such operations. Methods applied by security force members include the use of firearms and explosives in midst of indigenous civilians communities. More than 4 thousand IDPs have been accommodated in the neighbouring regions and shelters either by churches or the relatives of the IDPs.

Third: racist mind-set of the Indonesian government toward Papuans. West Papuan continues to be marginalized and stigmatized as provocateur due to the racist mind-set. For instance, Victor Yeimo, the International spokesperson of National Committee of West Papua who led the protests two years ago in Jayapura in response to racist slurs again Papuan. He was arrested and on trial in Indonesian court in Jayapura. While people who expressed the racist slur were not experience deterrent effect in the eyes of the law.

We become an object of the so-called development programme of the Indonesian government. West Papuan forcefully being *–Indonesianized*.

Fourth: Consumption-based development which is oriented to fulfil capitalist interest. As a result, it diminishes the dignity of West Papuan and destroys the harmonious relationship and the interconnectedness with other creations.

Papua Province has the lowest life expectancy in Indonesia, the highest infant mortality the highest with Malaria and AIDS. Population with the highest poverty rate in Indonesia. Prosperity approach which has been implemented through Special Autonomy Law in West Papua for twenty years, since 2001 is not improving the quality of lives of the Indigenous West Papuans. This year, when Papuan's People Assembly wanted to hold an evaluation toward the effectiveness of twenty years of the implementation of Special Autonomy Law for West Papua, it was banned by security forces in cooperation with the central government.

As a minority group of people living and experiencing systemic racism and military operation, I would like to say that protection of human rights in West Papuan is our urgent need.

Through this forum I would like to make the following recommendations

1. The Indonesian government should respect, protect, and fulfil the human rights of the West Papuans as a minority group. In the current context of conflict, the West Papuans have lost their sense of security in their own land. The access to education, health services and other basic needs of those who are displaced during the conflicts in Papua have also been continuously denied.
2. The Indonesian government should stop using the security approach in West Papua and stop giving impunity to the members of the Indonesian Army and Police Force who are involved in human rights violations.
3. The Indonesian government should withdraw its security forces from West Papua. The Indonesian security forces have been involved in the extractive industry, committed intimidation, killings and other forms of human rights violation, including silencing democratic freedom and freedom of expression.
4. The United Nations to ensure that perpetrators of human rights violations affiliated with Indonesian security forces are held accountable in transparent and fair trials.
5. The Indonesian government should provide humanitarian access to the United Nations and the international community to address the humanitarian crisis in the regions in West Papua affected by the conflict.
6. The Indonesian government should ensure the meaningful participation of the West Papuan representatives in the policy making process, as part of the right to self-determination. This should include policy in the use of natural resources in West Papua.
7. The Indonesian government should create a democratic space to meet the leaders of United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULMWP), to find a solution to more than 50 years of violent political conflict. There should be sustainable solutions to the conflict that can be accepted by all parties involved in the conflict, in particular the West Papuans.