



Article - N°2021-9
February 28, 2021

Indonesia and West Papua Relations

(Long) Road to Move Forward?

By Abid A. Adonis,
External contributor for Asia Centre



About Asia Centre

Founded in 2005, Asia Centre is an independent research institute fostering debates and publications on international, strategic and economic relations, as well as current political and social transformations in the Asia Pacific region. Asia Centre's fellows navigate both the academic world and the public and private decision-making centres, tackling significant regional issues and analyzing them in local and global perspectives.

Asia Centre's programmes are conceived for a large network of corporate partners and specialized research institutions from Europe, America and Asia. Joint operations led with those partners offer the opportunity to confront a wider range of ideas and issues.

Focusing on the study of original sources, the works and conclusions of our researchers are widely published via Asia Centre's own media and in the international press, journals and documentation.



ASIA CENTRE

contact@centreasia.eu

+33 1 7543 6320

<https://centreasia.eu/>



To quote this publication :

Abid A. Adonis, « Indonesia and West Papua Relations: (Long) Road to Move Forward? », Article 2021-9, Asia Centre, February 28, 2021.

About the author

Abid A. Adonis is a junior researcher at Abdurrahman Wahid Centre for Peace and Humanities, Universitas Indonesia. He has previously published works in the *Global: Jurnal Politik Internasional*, *E-International Relations*, and *ASEAN Insights*. His research area includes Indonesian foreign and security policy, Southeast Asia, and the role of technology in international relations. The view expressed herein do not reflect the official position taken by Asia Centre or other noted research centers.

Contact : adonis.indonesia@gmail.com



Abstract

Since its integration to Indonesia's territory the West Papua question has consistently put Jakarta in an uncomfortable position. The Dutch post-colonial and Suharto post-authoritarian legacies have historically polarised deep divisions among West Papuans internally and generated a complex relational pattern with the Indonesian central government. The rise of President Joko Widodo to power in 2014 and his re-election in 2019 brought new hope in West Papua. Despite Widodo's economic achievements in West Papua, the resistance persists and the humanitarian condition in the region remains severe. This paper argues that the problems stem from the intertwined economic, political-security, and humanitarian variables in which the central government, local government and pro-separatist groups share responsibility in various degrees. The Covid-19 pandemic also poses an additional challenge for West Papua, but, at the same time, provides a new humanitarian momentum to advance a constructive political settlement between all concerning parties in the region.



The Severe Past

The West Papua question has held a controversial dynamic since Indonesia gained its independence in 1945. In between 1945-1949, the Dutch attempted to reincorporate Indonesia to its territory through military aggression before Japan had occupied the Dutch East Indies in 1941. After four years of bloody battles Indonesia was able to achieve full recognition of its sovereignty from the Netherlands and the international community. However, the Netherlands still retained the territory of West Papua and wanted it to be an independent country from Indonesia. In response, pro-integration groups in both Indonesia and West Papua wanted the latter to be part of Indonesia, while pro-separatism groups in West Papua endorsed the Netherlands' proposal. This resulted in an open armed conflict between Indonesia and pro-integration groups in West Papua versus the Netherlands and pro-separatism groups (1961-1962), which ended with the signing of the New York Agreement. The Agreement, supported by the United Nations (UN) and the United States alike, transferred West Papuan authority from the Netherlands to Indonesia with the United Nations mandated to manage the peaceful transition. In addition, the agreement stated that the West Papuan people would hold a democratic plebiscite – so-called, The Act of Free Choice – to determine their destiny in 1969.¹

The Act of Free Choice (1969) turned into a long controversial debate and caused the relationship between Jakarta and Jayapura to be historically marked by security tensions between pro-integration and pro-separatism for over five decades. The Act is interpreted differently by the two groups. The pro-integration group believes it is representative, legally valid and legitimate, and supported by the international community including the United Nations, the United States and the Soviet Union. In contrast, pro-separatism groups believe that the Act is illegal and undemocratic. Disagreements over Indonesia's integration in West Papua, along with the Act, gave birth to the Free Papua Movement.² Together with other groups and resistance movements, each is now affiliated under the umbrella organisation United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULMWP), led by the United Kingdom-based chairman-in-exile Benny Wenda.

The problem is furthermore related to diverging opinions regarding the national imageries. The idea of Indonesian nationalism comprises the former Dutch colonial territorial integration stretching from Aceh in the west to West Papua in the east divides the West Papuans: some believe that West Papua is an integral part of Indonesia on the basis of the anti-Dutch colonialism and multi-ethnic Indonesia's nationalism. Some others believe that the West Papuan identity is an altogether exclusive identity due to the cultural differences with other

¹ Syafaruddin Usman Mhd and Isnawita Din. (2010). *Sejarah Papua dalam Pangkuan Ibu Pertiwi*.

² Richard Chauvel. (2005). *Constructing Papuan Nationalism: History, Ethnicity, and Adaptation*.



regions in Indonesia. They also believe that West Papua's colonial experience is quite different with Indonesia's own experience.³

Instead of being resolved politically, these diverging opinions have resulted in violent conflicts for more than five decades starting with Papua's incorporation into Indonesian territory. In the era of the military dictator Suharto, the Indonesian military used an "iron fist" approach to suppress the insurgency by pro-separatism groups, which led to various kinds of human rights violations and injustice. In addition, during that time, various efforts to improve West Papua economy did not provide inclusive benefits to the native West Papuans. It was well-demonstrated by various agreements on massive-scale foreign mining investments, like Freeport McMoran (USA). The developmentalist and iron fist approach by Suharto and his allies put Jakarta-West Papua relations almost constantly in turmoil resulting in West Papuans' severe grievances.⁴

The fall of the Suharto regime in 1998 engendered a new hope for democracy in Indonesia, including in West Papua. This provided a relatively broader space for democratic rights, aspirations and recognition for West Papuans, particularly during the Abdurrahman Wahid administration.⁵ Despite tensions of violence between the military and armed pro-separatism groups, Indonesia and representatives of West Papua succeeded in agreeing on the Special Autonomy Law (2001) for Papua which, among other things, stipulates special allocated funds, more recognition of indigenous and cultural rights, the establishment of the Majelis Rakyat Papua (Papua's People Assembly). The Law also promises the improvement of human rights situation and resolve humanitarian cases in the past.⁶

The Uncomfortable Present

The post-colonial legacy of the Dutch and Suharto's dictatorship put Jakarta and West Papua in an uncomfortable situation onto the present days. The promises stipulated by the Special Autonomy Law (2001) remain arduous to implement optimally due to multiple factors arising from both the central government and West Papuan regional government. This has made

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Denise Leith. (2002). "Freeport and the Suharto Regime, 1965—1998", *The Contemporary Pacific*. Vol. 14, No. 1, pp. 69-100.

⁵ Tirto. (2019). *Sejarah Cinta Presiden Gus Dur dan Bangsa Papua*, <https://tirto.id/sejarah-cinta-presiden-gus-dur-dan-bangsa-papua-eg2x>

⁶ Azmi Mutaqin. (2013) "Otonomi Khusus Papua Sebuah Upaya Merespon Konflik Dan Aspirasi Kemerdekaan Papua." *Politika: Jurnal Ilmu Politik Undip*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 5-18.



West Papua one of the poorest provinces in Indonesia and armed violence persist between the Indonesian military and pro-separatism groups resulting in hundreds civilian casualties.⁷

However, the rise of President Joko Widodo to power in 2014 promised another round of hope for change in West Papua. President Widodo expressed his promise and commitment by emphasising economic development for West Papua. As it stands, President Widodo already visited West Papua more often than any of his predecessors. President Widodo has also built massive infrastructure projects, which are expected to reduce economic inequality and improve the general welfare of West Papuans.⁸ President Widodo also succeeded in renegotiating US-based Freeport McMoran controversial mining's investment in West Papua by getting Indonesia's central government and the West Papua regional government to get a percentage share.⁹ This renegotiation evoked a symbolic message, in view that the Freeport McMoran has been seen as personified inequality and injustice for West Papua by Indonesia's government supported by the United States. President Widodo also appointed West Papuans as his special staff, namely Lenis Kogoya and, recently, Billy Mambrasar as another symbolic message that he wants some change in Indonesia's approach to West Papua.¹⁰ This resulted in President Joko Widodo receiving ninety percent support in West Papua for his second term election in 2019 defeating Suharto's son in law – Prabowo Subianto.¹¹

Yet the situation in Papua is still far from ideal; even though a number of significant achievements during the Jokowi era should be recognised, especially the improvement of the economy in West Papua. In 2019, there was an incident of racism in Surabaya, East Java, against West Papuan students. The involvement of the security forces and the lack of decisive and fair decisions from the Indonesian government triggered a series of demonstrations in a number of areas. Worse, a number of students and Papuans who demonstrated peacefully were also arrested by the security apparatus and the military. This created one of the largest series of demonstrations and riots in West Papua during mid to late-2019. The Indonesian government, apart from holding dialogues with Papuan representatives, also carried out a number of repressive measures and internet blockades.¹² This incident added to a long list of ongoing problems in West Papua where the violence clashes between the Indonesian military

⁷ Tirta. (2019). *Aktivist HAM Papua Ungkap 182 Warga Tewas Jadi Korban Konflik Nduga*. <https://tirta.id/aktivis-ham-papua-ungkap-182-warga-tewas-jadi-korban-konflik-nduga-eggE>

⁸ Kantor Staf Presiden. (2020). *Sentuhan Pemerintah untuk Kesejahteraan Papua*. <https://ksp.go.id/sentuhan-pemerintah-untuk-kesejahteraan-papua.html>

⁹ The Jakarta Post. (2018). *Indonesia Officially Controls 51 Percent of Freeport Shares: Jokowi*. <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2018/12/21/indonesia-officially-controls-51-percent-of-freeport-shares-jokowi.html>

¹⁰ Viva. (2019). *3 Tokoh Papua yang Jadi Staf Khusus Presiden*. https://www.viva.co.id/berita/politik/1189061-3-tokoh-papua-yang-jadi-staf-khusus-presiden?page=all&utm_medium=all-page

¹¹ Liputan 6. (2019). *Jokowi-Ma'ruf Raup 90,66 Persen Suara di Papua*. <https://www.liputan6.com/pilpres/read/3970146/jokowi-maruf-raup-9066-persen-suara-di-papua>

¹² Noory Okhtariza. (2019). "The Papua question for Jokowi's second term", *The East Asia Forum*, <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2019/11/16/the-papua-question-for-jokowis-second-term/>



versus pro-separatism armed groups are still ongoing, particularly in Nduga and Intan Jaya. Consequently, these resulted in a massive number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), who have not been appropriately handled by Indonesian government.¹³

At the international level, support for pro-separatism groups (ULMWP) is dominated by members of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG), notably Vanuatu and Solomon Islands. Using their Melanesian solidarity, these countries regularly discuss the West Papua question at the MSG, Pacific Island Forum (PIF), and the United Nations, particularly in the UN General Assembly (UNGA).¹⁴ These countries also voice support for the Kanak people in New Caledonia.¹⁵ In contrast, a different position is shown by Papua New Guinea, which shares border directly to West Papua, Indonesia.¹⁶ Papua New Guinea is also politically locked in with the problem of separatism in Bougainville which limits their own activism to support West Papua pro-separatism agenda. In recent years, Fiji has increasingly gotten closer with Indonesia in dealing with disaster reliefs and securing the legitimacy of their new government.¹⁷ Apart from the MSG members, Australia and New Zealand still support the legitimacy of the Indonesian government over West Papua even though several discussions about West Papua have taken place in their respective parliaments.¹⁸ Indonesia also has full support from ASEAN as a regional leader in Southeast Asia.¹⁹ China and the United States also prefer to secure their strategic interests by placing Indonesia as a strategic partner, so the options for supporting pro-separatist West Papua groups are very limited, if not off the table for the time being.²⁰ In turn, the United Kingdom, which hosts the ULMWP leader, Benny Wenda likewise still largely supports Indonesian sovereignty over Papua despite the marginal support of the pro ULMWP group in Westminster.²¹ The same thing also takes place in the

¹³ Human Rights Papua (2020). *Indonesian govt can't neglect internally displaced Papuans - UN requests detailed information*. <https://www.humanrightspapua.org/news/32-2020/637-indonesian-govt-can-t-neglect-papuan-refugees-internally-displaced-un-requests-detailed-information>

¹⁴ The Guardian. (2017). *Melanesian leaders condemn UN for turning 'a deaf ear' to West Papua atrocities*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/24/melanesian-leaders-condemn-un-for-turning-a-deaf-ear-to-west-papua-atrocities>

¹⁵ Tess Newton Cain. (2014). "The Melanesian Spearhead Group: What is it, and what does it do?", *Lowy Institute*. <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/melanesian-spearhead-group-what-it-and-what-does-it-do>

¹⁶ Johnny Blades. (2019) "Pacific islands stand ground on West Papua push", *The Interpreter*. <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/pacific-islands-stand-ground-west-papua-push>.

¹⁷ Fiji Government. (2017). *Fiji and Indonesia Sign Plan of Action on Disaster Management*. <https://www.fiji.gov.fj/Media-Centre/News/FIJI-AND-INDONESIA-SIGNS-PLAN-OF-ACTION-ON-DISASTE>

¹⁸ Camelia Webb-Gannon, et al. (2019) "Fight for freedom: new research to map violence in the forgotten conflict in West Papua", *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/fight-for-freedom-new-research-to-map-violence-in-the-forgotten-conflict-in-west-papua-128058>

¹⁹ Umair Jamal. (2020). "Will dynamics of conflict in West Papua, Indonesia change with COVID-19?", *ASEAN Today*. <https://www.aseantoday.com/2020/06/will-dynamics-of-conflict-in-west-papua-indonesia-change-with-covid-19/>

²⁰ Amelia Joan Liwe. (2019). "Why do the US, China and international community remain silent on Papua?", *The Conversation*, <https://theconversation.com/why-do-the-us-china-and-international-community-remain-silent-on-papua-123291>

²¹ Jarryd de Haan. (2019). "West Papua Issue Raised in UK Parliament, but Follow-Up Is Unlikely", *Future Directions*.



European Union and, specifically, in the Netherlands. At times the Dutch parliament discussed the West Papua issue but support for Indonesia is still largely favoured.²² Apart from MSG members, support for the ULMWP group at the global level comes mostly from non-state actor groups, especially by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and left-leaning activists focused on human rights.²³ In general, though, support for Indonesia is far more dominant than the sympathy professed towards pro-separatist West Papua groups.

The Recurring Problems

Two decades after The Special Autonomy Law (2001), Indonesia-West Papua relations are faced with at least three recurring and intertwining problems in which the Indonesian central government, West Papua local government and pro-separatist groups share responsibility to varying degrees.

Economic problems

The special autonomy funds from the central government to West Papua have significantly increased from IDR1,3 Trillion (US\$98 Million) in 2002 to IDR8,3 Trillion (US\$580 Million) in 2020.²⁴ In the last six years, these efforts have been followed by large infrastructure projects and increased connectivity within and outside West Papua.²⁵ However, the increase in economic growth does not resonate with the reality on the ground where the economic inequality persists. The main problem in the economic sector primarily lies in corruption. The special autonomy funds are abused and corrupted by a number of elites in West Papua and made it difficult for economic development projects to run optimally.²⁶ According to an anonymous source dealing with West Papua region in Indonesian law enforcement agency, the complex patron-client relationships among the West Papuan elites perpetuate these corrupt practices. The situation is increasingly worse when this patron-client pattern also takes place vertically between the West Papuan elites to the Jakarta elites. Law enforcement officials have always had great difficulties promoting corruption prevention and monitoring

<https://www.futuredirections.org.au/publication/west-papua-issue-raised-in-uk-parliament-but-follow-up-is-unlikely/>

²² Human Rights Papua. (2018). *Parliament members in the Netherlands concerned about situation of indigenous peoples in West Papua*. <https://humanrightspapua.org/news/28-2018/300-parliament-members-in-the-netherlands-concerned-about-situation-of-indigenous-peoples-in-west-papua>

²³ Jacobin. (2021). *Indonesia's Repression Hasn't Broken the West Papuan Freedom Struggle*. <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2021/01/indonesia-west-papua-colonialism-occupation>

²⁴ Kompas. (2020). *Mengenal Dana Otsus Papua*. <https://money.kompas.com/read/2020/08/19/095216326/mengenal-dana-otsus-papua?page=all>

²⁵ Okezone. (2019). *Fakta Pembangunan Infrastruktur Papua*. <https://economy.okezone.com/read/2019/11/02/320/2124887/fakta-pembangunan-infrastruktur-papua-dari-10-bandara-baru-hingga-pegunungan-arfak>

²⁶ MKD Universitas Cenderawasih. (2021). *Korupsi Dana Otsus Papua dan Papua Barat Ibarat Gunung Es*. <https://www.mkduncen.ac.id/korupsi-dana-otsus-papua-dan-papua-barat-ibarat-gunung-es/>

the transparency of the use of special autonomy funds and West Papua's taxes.²⁷ The practice of bribery and threats of violence remain serious problems that make it more challenging for business groups and private enterprises to grow and develop in West Papua. In handling such situations, according to a prominent East Javanese businessman in Wamena, business groups and private enterprises from outside West Papua tend to cooperate intensively with the military or police to secure their businesses interests ultimately exacerbating tension between the local population and the military-police-business groups. This situation is also aggravated by a number of infrastructure and economic projects that have not inclusively placed the participation of indigenous West Papuans in the decision making process.²⁸ As a result, there is a perception that infrastructure and economic projects are intended for non-West Papuans in West Papua rather than for native West Papuan people. A number of business and commercial practices reintroduced paradigms and methods implemented during the Suharto era, which damage the environment and are not inclusive and do not put Native West Papuans as the central subject in the economic activities.

Political-Security Problems

Along with contributing to economic inequality the aforementioned complex situation manifests a secondary concern: the political-security problem. In general, especially in major cities such as Jayapura, Manokwari, Fakfak and Merauke, the political and security situation is conducive to a relatively stable environment. A different reality is present in rural and mountainous areas though, where pro-separatist groups are based, such as: Nduga, Intan Jaya, and Puncak. Until now, gunfire has been ongoing and causing casualties from both sides.²⁹ Pro-separatist groups conduct guerrilla warfare and perform sporadic violent attacks against the Indonesian military. Coupled with the ability to camouflage themselves as civilians, pro-separatist groups are in control over difficult terrains, especially in forests, mountains and swamps making it a challenge for the Indonesian military-police forces to conduct counter-insurgency operations. Pro-separatist groups have also launched violent attacks against non-West Papuan civilians and West Papuan civilians considered sympathetic to the Indonesian military-police forces. Attacks from pro-separatist groups are systematically used to justify increased deployment of the Indonesian military-police joint force.³⁰ The Indonesian military-police operation resulted not only in victims from armed pro-separatist groups but, also, from

²⁷ CNN Indonesia. (2021). *Mahfud MD Minta Aparat Usut Dugaan Korupsi Otsus Papua*. <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20210223082821-12-609640/mahfud-md-minta-aparat-usut-dugaan-korupsi-otsus-papua>

²⁸ Asmiati Malik. (2019). *Pembangunan Inklusif yang Libatkan Semua Pihak adalah Solusi Lebih Baik untuk Papua*. <https://theconversation.com/pembangunan-inklusif-yang-libatkan-semua-pihak-adalah-solusi-lebih-baik-untuk-papua-122366>

²⁹ Human Rights Papua. (2020). *Update on the situation of IDPs from Nduga, Intan Jaya, and Mimika*. <https://www.humanrightspapua.org/news/32-2020/707-update-on-the-situation-of-idps-from-nduga-intan-jaya-and-mimika>

³⁰ Inews. (2020). *3000 Pasukan Gabungan TNI Polri Buru KKB di Tembagapura Papua*. <https://regional.inews.id/berita/3000-pasukan-gabungan-tni-polri-buru-kkb-di-tembagapura-papua>



the civilian population. Victims of both parties, along with civilian casualties, has resulted in a spiral conflict and generated humanitarian disasters.

In the last six years Indonesia has utilised a discursive strategy to delegitimise pro-separatist armed groups. These groups were formerly called the Organisasi Papua Merdeka (Free Papua Movement), or, more simply, Separatist Groups. Nowadays, though, Indonesian authorities refer to them as Kelompok Kriminal Bersenjata (armed criminal groups).³¹ This discursive strategy is employed in order to create the impression that the opposition is not a politically legitimate group, but rather merely groups of rioting bandits who disturb public security and order. In the same vein, the armed pro-separatist groups use a discursive strategy in their campaigns, too, by saying that the Indonesian military and police are a form of Javanese colonial occupation of West Papua, despite the fact that the Indonesian military-police consists of a multi-ethnic mix, including some from the West Papua province.³²

In the political sphere, the persistence of problems in West Papua is largely due to the lingering presence of the Suharto's New Order heavy reliance on a military paradigm and a hand of people previously close to Suharto who currently serve President Joko Widodo.³³ Although President Widodo strives to promote constructive solutions in West Papua, the reality on the ground is interpreted differently by his Suharto-related advisors. This condition is compounded by the fact that especially since 2019, the democratic situation in Indonesia has severely declined.³⁴ Illiberal practices such as the arrest of opposition activists, the use of partisan buzzers, and abuse of cyberspace authority have significantly put Indonesia's democracy in danger.³⁵ As a result the political voices of Indonesian citizens, including West Papuans, have faced serious challenges. This is coupled with the big governing coalition set up by President Widodo for his second term involving the opposition parties and figures, his two-times presidential election opponent, Prabowo Subianto (Suharto's son-in-law) as a Defense Minister.³⁶ It might be one of a kind event in the world where the two presidential nominees join in a big coalition after competing in a hotly contested election cycle. This situation makes

³¹ Antara News. (2020). *OPM Pantaskah Disebut KKB?* [https://megapolitan.antaranews.com/berita/79328/opm-pantaskah-disebut-kkb#:~:text=Jakarta%20\(ANTARA\)%20%2D%20Selama%20ini,kelompok%20kriminal%20bersenjata%20\(KKB\).&tx=Pemberontakan%20yang%20dilakukan%20OPM%20pun,dari%20penduduk%20sipil%20maupun%20militer](https://megapolitan.antaranews.com/berita/79328/opm-pantaskah-disebut-kkb#:~:text=Jakarta%20(ANTARA)%20%2D%20Selama%20ini,kelompok%20kriminal%20bersenjata%20(KKB).&tx=Pemberontakan%20yang%20dilakukan%20OPM%20pun,dari%20penduduk%20sipil%20maupun%20militer).

³² This information is derived from an interview with an anonymous Indonesian humanitarian activist based in Kabupaten Mimika, West Papua, February 23rd 2021.

³³ Tirto. (2019). "Rezim Militer" Jokowi dan Cengkeraman Serdadu atas Presiden Sipil. <https://tirto.id/rezim-militer-jokowi-dan-cengkeraman-serdadu-atas-presiden-sipil-elza>

³⁴ Eve Warburton. (2020). "Deepening Polarization and Democratic Decline in Indonesia", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/08/18/deepening-polarization-and-democratic-decline-in-indonesia-pub-82435>

³⁵ Ary Hermawan. (2020). "Politics of Pandemics: How Online 'Buzzers' Infect Indonesia's Democracy, Jeopardize Its Citizens," *The Jakarta Post*. www.thejakartapost.com/academia/2020/03/21/covid-19-doesnt-care-about-politics-how-online-buzzers-infect-indonesias-democracy.html.

³⁶ Olivia Tasevski. (2019). "Indonesia's New Cabinet and its Human Rights Implications", *The Interpreter*. <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/indonesia-s-new-cabinet-and-its-human-rights-implications>



the opposition voices very limited leaving only two less influential middle parties outside of the government. This has made criticism about Indonesia's central government (mis)treatment towards West Papua dominated by voices from non-governmental actors, especially from human rights activists, West Papuan indigenous groups, and West Papuan churches.³⁷ Notwithstanding the new domestic political landscape, the central government is still finding it arduous to produce concrete and constructive solutions to the West Papua question without an effective and credible opposition in the parliament.

Moreover, the vertical patron-client pattern between some West Papuan and central government elites hinders the possibility of creating a more constructive political situation for West Papuans. According to a young prominent West Papuan figure, there is a recurring huge gap between some West Papuan elites related to Jakartan elites with the ordinary West Papuans in the region. Accordingly, the West Papuans' political aspirations are frequently filtered by such a corrupt vertical patron-client pattern. This is added by the fact that central government elites are reluctant to talk with West Papuan youth, especially students. Worse, rather than inviting them to dialogue, the West Papuan students (and their activities) are habitually under surveillance by security authorities, especially in Jakarta, Yogyakarta, Surabaya, and Malang. Correspondingly, the lack of dialogue between Indonesian governments with West Papuan students contribute to the misunderstanding of Indonesian central government about the reality on the ground and increasingly distance them with the West Papuan future generations.

Humanitarian Problems

Economic and political-security problems are further irritated by humanitarian problems that have not been appropriately managed. As mentioned earlier, the situation in Nduga, Intan Jaya and Puncak has worsened in recent months. The increasing number of IDPs and civilian victims generates a humanitarian situation that cannot be solved properly as long as the armed conflict continues.³⁸ Fair judicial processes and humanitarian assistance are needed to send an important message that the problems in West Papua will be resolved through justice and decisive political leadership. A number of human rights cases from the past likewise require political will from Jakarta to be proceeded through a transparent and fair judicial process. A number of West Papuan activists who are not involved in the violence also need to be released immediately to guarantee the democratic rights of West Papuans.

³⁷ Jubi. (2019). *Elsham Papua: Hentikan Kriminalisasi terhadap Aktivistis dan Masyarakat Adat Papua*. <https://jubi.co.id/elsham-papua-hentikan-kriminalisasi-terhadap-aktivis-dan-masyarakat-adat-papua/>

³⁸ Kompas. (2021). *Konflik Senjata di Intan Jaya, Korban Jiwa Berguguran hingga Seruan Damai*. <https://regional.kompas.com/read/2021/02/17/17580121/konflik-senjata-di-intan-jaya-korban-jiwa-berguguran-hingga-seruan-damai?page=all>



Apart from the human rights situation and humanitarian disasters that need to be dealt with immediately, there is another complex problem that requires immediate attention – racism. Up till now racist behaviours have been structurally embedded within Indonesian society against West Papuans outside West Papua.³⁹ These behaviours rarely find severe consequences and create a perception among West Papuans that the Indonesian government simply neglects them. Racist incidents against West Papua have received limited attention from the Indonesian government. The Surabaya incident in 2019 was the culmination point that triggered massive West Papuan demonstrations across Indonesia, especially in the West Papua regions. The most obvious and persisting problem of racism are found in Java where West Papuan students are typically subject to negative stigma and prejudice.⁴⁰ The racism and discrimination against the Papuan students receive limited attention from the security authorities and the government, which aggravate the West Papuans' grievances and distancing the social connection with non-West Papuans. In addition, the minimal and prejudiced representation of West Papuans in the Indonesian media and pop culture adds to the negative stigma against West Papuans. This problem needs to be recognised and addressed accordingly to ensure the dignity of the West Papuan people is maintained not only as equal Indonesian citizens but as human beings, too. Appreciation and recognition of the dignity of the Papuan people must depart from the shifting paradigm and mindset of policy makers and, more broadly, the entire Indonesian society. More than economic and political rights, guarantee and respect as fellow human beings and equal citizens should arguably be the first and foremost priority in addressing West Papua issues.

Public Health Management Problems

Finally, the Covid-19 pandemic presents a further complexity to the already bitter combined economic, political-security and humanitarian situation in West Papua. The handling of the Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia, which is far from good, and seeing that the number of infections has exceeded one million cases, is an alarming signal. Adding to the difficult access and connectivity with other regions, health facilities in Papua that are far behind compared to other areas contribute to the even harder Covid-19 handling in West Papua.⁴¹ Hence, the Indonesian government needs to prioritise Papua not only in Covid-19 containment but in the vaccination roll-out, too. The involvement of indigenous and cultural groups along with churches in Papua needs to become a priority for the Indonesian government in an endeavour to increase awareness and discipline in containing Covid-19, as well as its vaccination roll-out. Additionally, the fate of IDPs in Nduga, Intan Jaya and Puncak needs to be seen as a risk of

³⁹ Aisha R. Kusumasomantri. (2021). "Want to Keep Papua in Indonesia? Let's Talk About Racism.", *Modern Diplomacy*. https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2021/02/06/want-to-keep-papua-in-indonesia-lets-talk-about-racism/?fbclid=IwAR2_g0eiSj56nHQ2QN84yNRhvDWc2KLyET9x0nkxhnnU0UAP3VADBX3SNAA

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Antara. (2021). *Covid-19 Keeps Posing Serious Threats to Papua: Task Force*. <https://en.antaranews.com/news/168552/covid-19-keeps-posing-serious-threats-to-papua-task-force>



Covid-19 transmission. An end to the armed conflict between the warring parties, now more than ever, becomes necessary and urgent. Covid-19 needs to be used as a momentum to not only stop violence from both sides, but also to find political common ground. Taking some historical lessons, in the past Indonesia was hit by the Tsunami in 2004 which later became a starting point and reflection for Indonesia and the separatist Free Aceh Movement (FAM) to end the conflict in Western Indonesia concluding with the Helsinki Agreement (2005) a year later.⁴² Covid-19 can be taken with the same reflection and momentum for the warring parties in West Papua to meet and find political solutions by prioritising justice, humanity, welfare, and security.

⁴² A more analysis on Helsinki Agreement between Aceh and Indonesia can be read in: Michael Morfit. (2007). “The Road to Helsinki: The Aceh Agreement and Indonesia’s Democratic Development”, *International Negotiation*. Vol. 12, Issue 1. Pp. 111-143.



Conclusion

The aforementioned analysis demonstrates the complexities of West Papuan problems are far beyond the oversimplifying question of whether the region should exercise the self-determination right or not as it is typically depicted in many analyses on West Papua. Indeed, the Dutch post-colonial and Suharto's dictatorship legacies share huge responsibilities in generating the problems in West Papua in the present days. The central government inability to bring a more humanitarian strategy to West Papua is the key question in any discussion of West Papua. But, at the same time, there is a necessity to consider and propose a constructive approach towards West Papuan leaders and local governments in managing their region transparently and effectively. One still cannot neglect the recurring violent conflicts between joint Indonesian military-police force versus armed pro-separatist groups that cause civilian casualties and internally displaced persons. It needs an immediate and concrete political arrangement to de-escalate the tension between the two parties by involving indigenous people, local churches, domestic humanitarian agencies and national human right activists, especially focusing on justice and humanitarian efforts. On the international level, instead of emphasising self-determination rights, it is a higher priority first to engage the Indonesian government on humanitarian efforts in West Papua. In the last few years, close observers have witnessed how separatist and secessionist self-determination plebiscites in other parts of the world tend to be more counter-productive to the agenda of improving the situation on the ground, as clearly demonstrated in Kurdistan, Catalonia, and Bougainville. Thus, it is necessary for all concerned parties to focus on engagement, especially on humanitarian engagements, rather than detachment, and use the momentum from the Covid-19 pandemic to build a brighter and better future in West Papua.



LAST PUBLICATIONS OF ASIA CENTRE

NORTHEAST ASIA

- Thomas L. Oomen, « Why the EU lacks behind China in AI development – Analysis and solutions to enhance EU’s AI strategy », February 2021
- Jean-Yves Colin, « La démographie coréenne se japonise », Janvier 2021
- Florian Veslin, « Japon : Bilan de l’énergie nucléaire, dix ans après Fukushima »,

SOUTHEAST ASIA

- Hadrien T. Saperstein, “Prayuth and the Art of Survival”, February 2021
- Hadrien T. Saperstein, “Looking Ahead, Southeast Asia After the Coup d’État in Myanmar”, February 2021

CENTRAL ASIA AND SOUTH ASIA

- Jean-Luc Racine « Le mouvement paysan indien : raisons d’être et interrogations politiques », Février 2021
- Jean-Luc Racine « Après le Quad et le 2+2: le partenariat stratégique Inde Etats-Unis à l’heure des tensions avec la Chine », Novembre 2020

PACIFIC

- Jean-François Di Meglio, Clément Durif, « Les habiles timoniers chinois dans la dépression commerciale : la signature du « RCEP » », Novembre 2020