

West Papua Human Rights Update from the UN Human Rights Council

Geneva, February 25-March 22 2019



Both the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Nduga and worsening clampdown on freedom of expression and assembly in West Papua were significant issues raised during the recent convening of the [40th session](#) of the United Nations Human Rights Council (25 Feb. - 22 Mar. 2019).

TAPOL, along with several collaborating West Papuan and international NGOs, co-hosted a [side event entitled “Indonesia: Ensuring the survival of indigenous Papuans”](#) on 7 March at Palais des Nations, Geneva. The objective of this event was to bring the discussion of the human rights situation in West Papua to Geneva, with updates from West Papuan people themselves. A recent ecumenical delegation from the World Council of Churches provided additional external witness to the current situation faced by the Indigenous peoples of West Papua.

Panelists included, Viktor Yeimo the international spokes-person of West Papuan National Committee (KNPB, *Komite Nasional Papua Barat*), Agustina Maryke, representative of Evangelical Christian Church of Tanah Papua, (GKI-TP, *Gereja Kristen Injil di Tanah Papua*) and Peter Prove, director of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs World Council of Churches (WCC).

Mr. Yeimo presented frontline experience on the rising trend and threats to the elimination of freedom of expression and freedom of assembly in West Papua. His organisation, KNPB, is a peaceful grassroots civil resistance movement in West Papua established in 2008 and has been one of the most heavily persecuted organisations in West Papua. In recent months the KNPB offices have been heavily surveilled and their members are frequently harassed, beaten and arrested, in some cases being charged with treason and imprisoned. In January 2019, three KNPB members have been arrested and charged with treason.

Ms. Maryke (GKI-TP) focused on the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Nduga regency, Papua province. The killing of 19 road construction workers on 2 December 2018 in Nduga, by which local armed groups have claimed responsibility, has led to a major joint military and police operation in Nduga regency. Additional security forces personnel have been deployed to the region. As a consequence, civilians in the area have been affected significantly. More than 2000 civilians have been internally displaced. The death toll is rising as a direct result of the joint military and police operations. This includes internally displaced people (IDP) experiencing harsh living conditions while fleeing the conflict area and the lack of access to health services and other resources. Children are left out of school. Local NGOs currently attending to the refugees in Wamena have reported that they have set up temporary schools for the more than 600 displaced children. The Indonesian security forces have also allegedly been using chemical weapons during recent operations, although such allegations cannot be confirmed without independent investigations which have thus far been prevented from entering the area.

Access to West Papua remains restricted. International organisations and foreign journalists are required to obtain official approval before visiting West Papua. The World Council of Churches (WCC) delegations are one of the international organisations who were able to visit West Papua in recent months. In February 2019, a WCC delegation visited West Papua and met with various stakeholders including state authorities, military and police officials, traditional leaders and West Papuan victims of the ongoing conflict and human rights violations. Observations shared by the WCC delegation included that West Papuans are systematically marginalized and excluded in all areas of life, children are among the victims of the ongoing violence and live in terror with the presence of the police and the military, and that the relative population of Indigenous West Papuans is decreasing while the population of immigrants increases.

During the Human Rights Council General Debate Item 3 on 8 March, [Franciscans International](#) presented their concerns on the situation of health and access to food in West Papua, and that indigenous peoples continue to be marginalised due to large scale business and development projects.

On 13 March, Mr. Yeimo delivered a statement on behalf of [Geneva for Human Rights](#), spoke as part of Item 4 of Human Rights Council General Debate on 'human rights situations that require the Council's attention' and urged the Council to encourage the Indonesian government to provide access to independent human rights investigations as well as humanitarian assistance. The Indonesian human rights lawyer Veronica Koman also delivered a statement on behalf of [Vivat International](#), TAPOL, [International Coalition for Papua](#), [West Papua Netzwerk](#), and Franciscans International. Ms. Koman spoke to emphasise the serious issues of the excessive use of force upon indigenous West Papuans, the ongoing military operation in Nduga has resulted in the death of more than 25 people as well as displacing more than 2000 civilians. [Franciscans International also raised concerns](#) about high levels of violence and other human rights violations that continue to be reported in West Papua.

During Item 9 of the General Debate regarding racial discrimination (19 March), Geneva for Human Rights raised concerns about systematic racial discrimination imposed by the Indonesian government that is threatening the survival of indigenous West Papuans.

TAPOL along with other international organizations also had the opportunity to meet with representatives from various Special Rapporteurs' offices.

TAPOL is calling on the UN Human Rights Council to pay attention to the severe limitation of civil liberties in West Papua and the worsening human rights situation, particularly with respect to violations perpetrated by Indonesian security forces on indigenous West Papuans. The military approach employed in West Papua is a destructive force on indigenous West Papuan communities. We call on the international community and foreign governments to encourage the Indonesian government to open access to West Papua, to reduce the use of a military approach in West Papua, to guarantee the safety of human rights defenders on the ground, and to provide the West Papuans with opportunity to make their voices heard.

[TAPOL](#) campaigns for human rights, peace and democracy in Indonesia. We are based in the UK and work to raise awareness of human rights issues in Indonesia, including in the contested territory of West Papua. Founded on grassroots campaigning, TAPOL works closely with local organisations in Indonesia to advocate for truth and justice and encourage the international community to take action.