

United Nations Forum on Minority Issues: “Minorities in situations of humanitarian crises”
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By: Simon P. Sapioper

Thank you Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As a member of the Organisasi Papua Merdeka, the Nationaal Papoea Vereniging '95 West Nieuw Guinea would like to draw attention to two challenges that are undermining the rights of West Papuans, namely media restrictions faced by journalists and the situation faced by West Papuan refugees.

Mr. Chairman,

Because of the constant increase of Indonesian migrants to West Papua, indigenous West Papuans risk of being outnumbered by the Indonesian population, and of losing their economic, social and cultural identity. More issues that Papuan people are facing are poor living conditions and not enough access to education and health care.

Journalists who like to raise awareness on these problems are limited in their freedom of expression. Fear of violence and harassment by public officials often cause local journalists to hide their political views. Also foreign journalists are subject to media restrictions by the Indonesian government, even though the 50-year ban on foreign media was lifted last year. The result of these restricted media access is that the international community, including those who promote the human rights of the West Papuan people, are not enough aware of the issues faced by Papuan people.

Mr. Chairmen,

Another issue I would like to stress today is the situation faced by West Papuan refugees living in Papua New Guinea. These refugees are afraid of going back to West Papua because of the on-going political instability and violence in the region. Papua New Guinea still denies asylum to many West Papuan refugees and wrongly labels them as illegal immigrants. These refugees live in poverty and in unsafe houses; their children cannot go to school because their parents struggle to provide for enough food.

Therefore, the refugees, whose political status is not being recognized and who are not enough assisted in support for their basic needs, need help to alleviate their problems.

Mr. Chairmen,

Therefore, the Nationaal Papoea Vereniging '95 West Nieuw Guinea would like to:

- strongly call on the international community to support the promotion and protection of the rights of the West Papuans. And, considering that the Republic of West Papua has proclaimed independence unilaterally 1 July 1971, we would like to ask for the recognition of the right of self-determination.
- call for the protection of journalists in being able to carry out their profession in a truthful and, above all, safe manner, so that they can create national and international awareness of the marginalization of indigenous peoples.
- urge the Papua New Guinea government to recognize the political status of West Papuan refugees in the region, and to increase the efforts to support for their basic needs.

Thank you for your attention.

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