

Committee: Security Council



Topic: Self-determination for West Papua

Background Information

Introduction

Despite recent escalation and increasing demand from West Papua natives to be recognised as their own state, effectively requesting a right for self-determination, the Indonesian government has held a strong stance in maintaining sovereignty over the region. This goes as far as resisting efforts to make use of internationally mediated third-party dialogue (notably called upon by many Papuans, including those in government), or even any interference from journalists, diplomats and other organisations such as (but not limited to) the International Committee of the Red Cross, Amnesty International and Peace Brigades International.

West Papua is a highly desirable region for Indonesia, bearing the title of its most resource-rich province (e.g it is home to the world's largest gold mine). Due to Indonesian law giving it almost unrestricted access, Indonesia has been able to largely benefit from West Papua's natural resources (such as gold, silver, natural gas, copper, timber) through intensive resource extraction by large multinational companies working in collusion with the Indonesian government, e.g Freeport. The Indonesian economy is therefore dependent upon continued access to these on preferential terms, constituting a basis for the government's reticence to relinquish its hold on West Papua. This exploitation has fuelled pro-independence sentiments within West Papua, as well as provoking a great degradation of the environment within the region.

This exploitation, along with a great sense of injustice growing since the 1969 Act of Free Choice, and the ongoing violence against Papuans, have constituted the basis for the continuous escalation of the pro-independence sentiment and demonstrations within West Papua. The promised 'internationally supervised act of self-determination' which represented a condition for the transfer of administrative control of West Papua back to Indonesia resulted in a fraudulent referendum, in which handpicked representatives were forced to vote for integration, representing less than 1% of eligible voters. Following this the United Nations proceeded to recognise Indonesian rule despite 'taking note' that the results of the Act of Free Choice did not 'accurately or democratically represent the will of the Papuan people'. This entertains the Papuans' view that the whole process was indeed fraudulent and undemocratic, and deserving of a new referendum and dialogue. However, this also allows the Indonesian government to proclaim that they have respected all conditions in the final stages of a decolonisation process, therefore giving them the right to ascertain their authority over a territory which was always meant to be a part of the Republic of Indonesia.

Finally, and what may constitute the greatest cause for international concern, the ongoing violence against Papuans (not to mention the reporters or diplomats) demanding the right for self-determination has sparked anger among many and laid grounds for accusations of genocide and crimes against humanity,



conducted by the Indonesian government. An estimated 100 000 to 500 000 indigenous inhabitants have been killed. Harassment of political activists, as well as intimidation through generalised violence by the Indonesian security forces is a regular feature of the West Papuan socio-political landscape. Evidence found gives a “strong indication that the Indonesian government has committed genocide against the West Papuans” and “many of these acts clearly constitute crimes against humanity under international law”, as described in a 2004 report presented by Yale Law School. These accusations clearly strengthen the belief of many Papuans that their self-determination is the only feasible solution to prevent these crimes from continuing, without their region being damaged and exploited.

Definition of Key Terms

Self-determination:

Self-determination refers to the exertion of a state’s right to freely choose its political, economic, social and cultural systems. Additionally, it describes the process by which a people may constitute themselves into a state, creating national governmental institutions, or in other terms a community’s right to choose its own political destiny. Following World War Two, the right for self-determination was enshrined in the UN Charter, solidifying it as a key principle in modern international law.

Referendum:

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, the widely accepted definition of a referendum is a direct vote in which the citizens of a country or a state are asked to give their opinion or decide on a topic that concerns an important political or social question on a national level. It should be conducted in line with the democratic principles of fair vote, representation and free choice in order to be considered valid.

New York Agreement:

The New York Agreement is an agreement negotiated during meetings hosted by the United States between the Netherlands and Indonesia regarding the territory West New Guinea. The agreement concludes in two parts that the United Nations should assume administration of the territory, and proposes a set of conditions if the United Nations allows Indonesian occupations the territory (1962).

Act of Free Choice (Indonesian):

The Act of Free Choice (Or Determination of the People's Opinion) was an election held in August 2, 1969 in which 1,025 men and women allegedly selected by the Indonesian military in Western New Guinea voted unanimously in favour of Indonesian control.

Timeline of Events

1670-1900	Dutch colonists bring the whole of what is now Indonesia under one government as the Dutch East Indies
1942	Japan invades Dutch East Indies
1945	After Japanese surrender, nationalist leader Sukarno returns from exile and declares independence
1949	The Dutch recognise Indonesian independence after four years of guerrilla warfare.
1962	New York Agreement installed, which handed West Papua over to Indonesia from the Dutch after a transition period of a year under UN authority
1969	Act of Free Choice determines West Papua as sovereign territory of Indonesia
1998	Fall of former Indonesian president Suharto
2001	Special Autonomy Law offered to West Papua aiming to reduce pro-independence sentiments by the devolution of most government affairs to the Papuan provincial Government
2019	Papua protests, violent protests and demonstrations in Papua's largest cities

Recent International Precedents

Conflicts resembling the one concerning West Papua have in the past been successfully resolved with the aid of the UN. Such an analogy is found with the case of East-Timor, a Portuguese colony which gained internationally recognised independence after declaring itself independent in 1975. It parallels the case of West Papua, both having been under Indonesian control (in the case of East Timor from 1975 to 2002), both having suffered extreme human right abuses (an estimate of 100 000 to 250 000 people died under Indonesian rule in East Timor), both rendering media access extremely difficult and rare, both suffering from marginalisation of the local population due to transmigration, and both populations having been brought up under Indonesian rule but not identifying as Indonesian. In the case of East-Timor, this situation was resolved through a fair and democratic UN-sponsored referendum in 1999, in which an overwhelming majority of

Timorese voted to be their own state. This result was finalised following a United Nations-administered transition period, in 2002. This case is especially relevant to the case of West Papua due to the similarities in the situations of these regions, and the solution which was found in East Timor which is largely hoped for by many Papuans.

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