

Solidarity with West Papua

October 2021

“Thus says the Lord: Act with justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor anyone who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place.” Jeremiah 22:3

“The Uniting Church in Australia has partnered in solidarity and service with Gereja Kristen Injili di Tanah Papua (GKI-TP), the Evangelical Christian Church in the Land of Papua for more than 20 years. We stand in solidarity with the West Papua Council of Churches in seeking solutions that will lead to genuine and constructive dialogue, end the suffering of their people and bring about peace.”
Dr Deidre Palmer, ex-President, Uniting Church in Australia National Assembly

Request from our Partner Church in Papua

At Easter this year, the then National President of the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA), Dr Deidre Palmer, received a pastoral letter from the West Papua Council of Churches calling for support in their quest to have human rights issues addressed. It began by saying:

Year after year, the Papuan people mourn their deep, prolonged sorrows. The two important Christian celebrations, Christmas and Easter, are never celebrated peacefully.

The letter went on to highlight several pressing concerns, including:

- the death and displacement of civilians as a result of action by the security forces;
- an increase in Indonesian police and army deployment, leaving West Papua “surrounded from all directions, land, sea and air”;
- systemic racism and ongoing racist acts and speech directed at indigenous West Papuans;
- the contraction of democratic spaces and violation of civil and political rights, with security forces intercepting and arresting those engaged in peaceful protests; and
- deforestation and environmental crime, with an average deforestation rate of around 34,000 ha per year.

The International Coalition for Papua reports that, “The number of arbitrary arrests, political and non-political, continue to be high as the police firmly restrict the freedom of peaceful assembly and other civil-political rights.” Other human rights organisations continue to raise concerns about particular incidences of arrests and killings, as does the United Nations.

Assembly Support

Dr Palmer passed on the concerns of our Papuan partners, writing to the Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne and the Indonesian Ambassador to Australia, Mr Yohanes Kristiarto Soeryo Legowo. In particular, Dr Palmer called on the Australian Government to advocate to the United Nations (UN) for the UN Commissioner for Human Rights to visit West Papua to investigate human rights violations. She also asked for the Indonesian Government to enter into dialogue with Indigenous West Papuan leaders to seek peaceful solutions to end the ongoing conflict and human rights abuses.

Dr Palmer encouraged all UCA members to pray and support the people of West Papua by advocating for similar outcomes and encouraged those who can to: “contact their local Federal Member of Parliament asking them to support these requests, particularly in relation to a UN delegation to West Papua.”

The Assembly has advocated for improvements to human rights in Papua over a long period as it has been a long-term partner to GKI-TP through its relief and development agency UnitingWorld.

World Council of Churches Support

The World Council of Churches (WCC) central committee has also made statements concerning West Papua. In May 2019, the WCC issued a statement of solidarity with the people of West Papua, expressing concern about:

The very heavy military-security approach of the Indonesian authorities in the region, and its consequences in terms of conflict and associated human rights violations.

We are also gravely concerned about reports of the accelerating deforestation and environmental degradation in West Papua, especially in light of the importance that these forest areas have for Indigenous Papuan people's traditional livelihoods and culture, and their global significance concerning the challenges of climate change and extinction of species.

Case Study – Rev Yeremia Zanambani

The Indonesian National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM) has concluded that an Indonesian soldier, Alpiua Hasim Madi, tortured and shot a 67-year-old Protestant pastor on 19 September 2020 in the Intan Jaya district of West Papua. Rev Yeremia Zanambani of the Gospel Tabernacle Church of Indonesia was murdered in Hitadipa village following the killing of a soldier on 17 September 2020. The soldier was killed in a gun battle between the Indonesian army and the West Papua National Liberation Army members.

Three or four other soldiers were present when Rev Zanambani was murdered.

Reports state Rev Zanambani was tortured to try and obtain information about the weapon taken from the soldier who had been killed. Rev Zanambani was found on the evening of 19 September in his pigpen. He had been shot in the arm and stabbed in the neck. He died a few hours after being found. He identified his murderer as an Indonesian soldier.

On 18 September 2020, soldiers had burnt down the official residence of a local health worker in the village, alleging that the house sheltered a separatist fighter.

In April 2020, two villagers went missing in Intan Jaya after being detained by soldiers.

What You Can Do

Write polite and respectful letters to:

Australian Government

Senator the Hon Marise Payne
Minister for Foreign Affairs

PO Box 6100
Senate
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Salutation: Dear Minister

Your Local Federal Member of Parliament

Please look up your local MP.

All contact details for Members of Parliament can be found at the [Federal Parliamentary website](#).

Salutation: Dear Sir/Mr/Madam/Ms

Letter Writing Action

Points to make in your letter:

- Thank the Australian Government for its support for human rights internationally.
- Request Australia's advocacy to the United Nations and the Indonesian Government for:
 - the UN Commissioner for Human Rights to visit West Papua to investigate human rights violations, and;
 - the Indonesian Government to enter into dialogue with Indigenous West Papuan leaders to seek peaceful solutions to end the ongoing conflict, human rights abuses and environmental impacts.