

Statement of the Catholic Women of West Papua in Response to the Visit of the Bishops' Conference of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands to the Diocese of Jayapura, Papua

Your most Reverend Bishops,

Welcome to Jayapura, West Papua.

This statement is from Catholic Papuan women. We apologize for not being able to formally welcome you in a manner according to our customs as Melanesians. We only received word late last night by SMS that you were visiting our land. If we had have known from the Diocese that you were coming we would have liked to have given you a proper reception as guests of honour.

It is very rare for Bishops to visit West Papua. Few foreigners and even fewer esteemed guests like yourselves are able to get permission to come, or are willing to risk visiting our country. We are deeply grateful the Bishops Conference of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands has heard our voice. We are touched that you have made the journey to West Papua. We want you to know that this visit is so important for us. Because of this we wish to express the following messages and aspirations. We hope you can communicate these to the wider Catholic Church in your own countries and beyond.

1. Thank you for being with us; for listening to us. We want you to know that we are not free. We are confined in a situation that is full of violence. Because of the Indonesian police and military we do not feel safe in our own land.
2. We would like to thank the Bishops conference in PNG and Solomon Islands who has heard the voice of our people. We want you to know that we want to be free. We desire to determine our own future, freely and fairly. We want you to know that the United Liberation Movement for West Papua represents us. They have our full support.
3. We would like to thank the Bishops of the Solomon Islands and the people of the Catholic Church in the Solomon Islands. You have given us your full support. We know very well that the Catholic Church in Solomon Islands has specifically organized novenas, fasting and daily Mass leading up to the Melanesian Spearhead Group meeting and on the day of the Leaders Meeting in Honiara in June 2015. We know you have prayed for us and Catholics of the Solomon Islands have marched with us. We know you have given voice to our struggle and heard the aspirations of the people of West Papua expressed through our representatives, the United Liberation Movement for West Papua. Because of this the ULMWP has been made a observer member of the MSG. May God the creator bless the Church and the people of Solomon Islands.
4. We also wish to thank the Bishops and the Catholic Church in PNG. For years you have noticed West Papuan refugees in your midst. You have faithfully served our sisters and brothers who have been forced to cross the border

because their lives and the lives of their families have been threatened and made unsafe in their own country. The Catholic Church in Papua New Guinea has made one of the teachings of Jesus Christ visible to the world. You are giving life to those who are displaced. You love them as fellow human beings. May God bless the community and the Catholic Church in Papua New Guinea.

5. We respectfully submit that the conditions of life of the indigenous Papuan Catholics are currently in a poor state. Our people experience violence and death because of the brutal actions of the Indonesian military and police. Every day more and more migrants arrive. We are becoming a minority in our land and even in our own church while the Indonesian people master all aspects of life. Because of this we need the support of the Bishops Conference of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. We fervently pray that one of our own sons and daughters, an Indigenous West Papuan, will become a Bishop.
6. We respectfully implore you to keep standing with us, to ensure that human rights are respected in our land. So many cases of violence and injustice, of human rights abuses, have not been resolved. The State does not address these. In fact, they are often the perpetrators or protect the perpetrators, so we feel we have nowhere to turn. Sadly, the Catholic Church in West Papua is largely silent about this and does not give voice to our cry for justice. Therefore we ask that Bishops outside of West Papua, in Melanesia and the other Pacific Island countries in particular, continue to speak up in support of justice and peace in West Papua.
7. We have a specific hope regarding human rights violations in our land. We beseech the Conference of Bishops to encourage the Pacific Island Forum to immediately send a human rights fact finding mission which they promised to do last year in Port Moresby. We want you to know that we Catholics in West Papua and in fact all the Papuan people are ready to accept the Pacific Island Forum fact-finding team.
8. We also wish to tell you that we Catholics are ready to greet the arrival of Pope Francis to Papua in 2017. We would be delighted and honoured if he would visit West Papua.
9. Finally, as women who have and will give birth to generations of Papuan Melanesians we hope for your continued support and prayers. We express our deepest and most sincere gratitude to all the Bishops in order that our nation and future generations of West Papua could be saved and our country liberated.

Yours truly,

The Catholic Papuan women of West Papua

Jayapura, West Papua 9 April 2016