



CATHOLIC JUSTICE AND PEACE COMMISSION OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF BRISBANE

*Penola Place
3rd Floor, 143 Edward Street
Brisbane QLD 4000
GPO Box 282 Brisbane QLD 4001
Ph. 07 3324 3441
Fax 07 3336 9177
ABN 25 328 758 007*

Media Statement

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Stop Human Rights Double Standards for West Papua

The major political parties in Australia must end their double standards on human rights advocacy in our region. Successive Australian Governments have, for the most part, ignored gross, long running human rights abuses by Indonesian security forces in West Papua while, at the same time, publicly condemning similar abuses when they happen elsewhere in the region.

In the last week, Foreign Affairs Minister, Julie Bishop, publicly condemned the actions of PNG police who fired shots into a group of unarmed students and insisted that the right to express political opinions publicly is a fundamental civil right which must be respected. Furthermore, the Australian Federal Police suspended cooperation with the PNG Police over the incident.

Yet, on the same island of New Guinea in the Indonesian occupied territory of West Papua, successive Australian Governments have ignored years of peaceful protesters and political leaders being arrested, beaten, tortured and even killed. When almost 2000 peaceful protesters were arrested on the streets of cities around West Papua in early May this year, where was the public condemnation by Australia's political leaders? Where was the suspension of Australian Federal Police cooperation with the Indonesian Police as a result of this gross abuse of human rights?

Today is the anniversary of the shooting and killing of West Papua National Committee leader, Mako Tabuni, on the streets of Jayapura in 2012. He was shot in the leg by security forces, taken to the police hospital and never came out alive. West Papua National Committee leaders say that more than two dozen of their leaders and members have experienced a similar fate since Mr Tabuni's death. The killings are not restricted to activists. Four teenagers were killed in Enarotali in the highlands of West Papua in December 2014 when police shot into an unarmed crowd, but there was no Australian condemnation nor suspension of police cooperation with Indonesia because of this or the many other outrageous actions of Indonesian security forces.

The Indonesian police and military act with total impunity and Australia says or does nothing - unlike what we have done recently in Papua New Guinea.

Australia must apply the same standards in West Papua as it does in Papua New Guinea. Australia needs to stand up for innocent and peaceful Papuans exercising their civil and political rights on both sides of the island of New Guinea. It needs to challenge the ruthless brutality of not only the PNG Police but also the Indonesian police and military in West Papua.

Chairperson: Maree Rose – email marose@bne.catholic.edu.au
Executive Officer: Peter Arndt – email arndtp@bne.catholic.net.au

A recent incident brings home this point for our Commission. A Commission delegation visited West Papua in February this year. Among the many Papuans it met was Robert Jitmau. He was a good man who was trying to help Papuan women in Jayapura who sold their produce in the local markets. Although the facts cannot be fully confirmed, on 20 May, Robert was run over by a police car. Reports we have received, suggest the police car then backed over Robert's body. He was taken to the police hospital and some reports indicate his body was mutilated. Robert was just 40 years old. He was not a political activist. He was trying to help local women get a fair go and Indonesian authorities did not seem to like his work. The story of his and Mako Tabuni's death is far from uncommon. We cannot accept this appalling situation nor can we tolerate Australia's inaction.

In the name of decency, Australia's double standards and silence on West Papua must stop. In the name of justice, all Australian political parties must commit to take action to protect the civil and political rights of the people of West Papua.

For further information and comment, please contact Peter Arndt on +61 409 265 476 or +61 7 3324 3441. Peter Arndt is Executive Officer of the Catholic Justice & Peace Commission of the Archdiocese of Brisbane and is also Leader of the Coordinating Team of the Australian West Papua Solidarity movement.