

PAPUA DESK MISSION STATEMENT

Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Sydney, 2008.

Jim Elmslie, Research Fellow, CPACS. Papua Desk Executive Officer.

The Papua Desk has grown out of eight years of discussions, conferences and workshops conducted by the West Papua Project at CPACS. Its goal is to have a positive impact on the conflict in Papua between the indigenous West Papuans and the Indonesian government, military and business enterprises. We aim to strengthen the hand of the West Papuans in their struggle for survival by providing well-sourced, succinct but comprehensive information across a range of areas in which the conflict is playing out. This information is also for the use of journalists, politicians, NGO's and government bodies, who are seeking accurate and timely briefings on an often opaque and complicated situation. It is anticipated that the conflict will intensify in the months and years to come, leading to a concomitant increase in demand for this information.

One factor influencing us is the reality that in the era of globalization and global warming, political conflicts no longer occur in isolation. For instance the consequences of corruption-fueled mass deforestation in Papua will affect all the world's citizens, not just Indonesians and West Papuans. To counter global warming it will be necessary to vigorously confront tropical forest destruction across the globe – including on the island of New Guinea. This is a pragmatic consideration incumbent on all thoughtful people who can grasp the dilemmas facing the planet. It is a human duty.

Another major motive derives from the primacy of human rights. Without basic human rights economic development becomes meaningless – a material veneer that can be expunged at whim by those in power. The suppression of human rights is always linked with an undemocratic elite, who protect their privileges through the domination of the rest of society. This invariably leads to a corruption of society's vital institutions: the bureaucracy, the judiciary, the military and the police. Almost inevitably environmental devastation ensues, as even minimal standards are side stepped in order to maximize profits. Promotion of human rights is therefore a fundamental tool in defending the global environment, now of vital concern to every individual.

Promotion of human rights is also an end in itself. We must be concerned for the oppressed Other, not least because, should we find our own selves oppressed, we would seek the aid of those in a position to provide succor. Practical compassion is, therefore, at the heart of humanity and socially responsible religion and philosophy. Nowadays this esoteric *rationale* for human rights activism has been reinforced by the imperative of enlightened self-interest: without a radical change in the way humans interact with the planet, global warming will become catastrophic and the future for humanity bleak. Only with the acknowledged supremacy of human rights, and their implementation, will this radical change occur. While this may be considered unduly optimistic it is hard to see any practical alternative: more-of-the-same 'development' will only bring ruin.

The struggle in West Papua should be viewed in the global prism outlined above. It is both a humanitarian catastrophe for the West Papuans caught up in the horrors of Indonesian military occupation and resource exploitation, and a vital concern for earth's environment. The forces driving the Indonesian juggernaut are primarily, but not exclusively, economic. The profits and tax revenue derived from the exploitation of mineral, oil and gas deposits and the logging of forests are immense. The pursuit of these profits and revenues underpins all aspects of social and political development in West Papua. It both creates the need for an occupying army and the wherewithal to pay for one. The resultant system is so corrupt that even the Indonesian President has little influence on the massive forces at play. This was made explicit when US Congressman, Eni Faleomavaega, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, and the Global Environment, visited Papua in November 2007. Despite his trip being personally authorised by President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, with assurances that he would have full access and complete co-operation, the Congressman was corralled by the TNI, blocked from meeting all but a few West Papuans and led on farcical diversions from his intended, agreed upon, itinerary. He was so angry at his treatment that he subsequently wrote to the Indonesian President threatening to question US recognition of Indonesian sovereignty over West Papua¹.

In this context the Papua Desk hopes to become a beacon of light shining on a dark corner of the Pacific. Organised along the lines of a 'country desk' in a Department of Foreign Affairs, the Papua Desk will be a central clearing house for information across the knowledge spectrum. The major spheres of information gathering: economic, social, political, environmental and military, will be broken for designated individuals to further specialize and become acknowledged experts in their field. Currently 16 correspondents have responded to the Papua Desk's call for volunteers. They are to provide an initial briefing paper of 1 – 2,000 words on each specific field. Footnoting and sourcing are to be of academic standard, adjudicated by Professor Peter King, Department of Government and International Relations, Sydney University. Information will be accessed via a Papua Desk website linked to the main CPACS website. Further information requests will be dealt with on an *ad hoc* basis depending on the field and the correspondent.

This will allow clients (those who seek the services that the PD supplies) to quickly access a current and comprehensive assessment of whatever knowledge area they are interested in. While primarily a free service Papua Desk may negotiate a fee from clients who intend to use the information provided for commercial purposes. Such clients might include governments; international NGO's such as the UN or World Bank, or commercial entities. It is the intention of Papua Desk to forge linkages with colleagues in Europe, the US and Indonesia, so the organization becomes truly global. Papua Desk also intends to seek funding from appropriate bodies to enable its evolution into a leading international entity providing information and analysis on West Papua.

¹ Congressman Eni Faleomavaega and Congressman Donald Payne, *House Foreign Affairs' Subcommittee Chairmen call upon Indonesia to end unreasonable restrictions on international access to West Papua*, Washington D.C., March 10, 2008.