

*POSITION STATEMENT FROM THE CHURCH LEADERS
IN THE LAND OF PAPUA*

To Mr. President, and all government officials of good will.

Allow us, the leaders of the largest churches in Papua, to express our concern regarding the current situation in Papua. We as leaders of the religious community in Papua want to share our hearts with all of you, because the current situation is a human tragedy that has kept us all away from seeing the image of every human being as the 'face of God on earth'.

To illustrate the situation in Papua, let us start by quoting a portion from a recent Kompas article: "Amnesty International Indonesia noted that from 2018 to 2022 there were at least 91 cases of extrajudicial killings involving the Army, Police, corrections officers, and Papuan pro-independence groups that killed at least 177 civilians. Meanwhile, the number of army and police members who became victims in the same period was 44 people, and members of the pro-independence group were 21 people.

The Institute for Policy Analysis and Conflict Studies (IPAC) data also shows that the number of incidents of insurgency-related violence from 2010 to 2021 continues to increase, exceeding 80 cases in 2021. These incidents killed at least 320 people, mostly civilians (178 people), members of the security forces (92 people), and armed groups (50 people). As many as 98 percent of deaths (316 people) occurred in Papua Province. Research from the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) also reveals that violence in Papua is four times greater than the national average. This is very ironic considering that Papua has one of the highest ratios of security forces per population compared to other provinces."

The escalation described in the general data above is compounded by a number of other recent events. There was a killing by army members in Timika [4 people died], there was shooting incident by the security forces at the mob in Wamena [9 people died], there was the killing of a number of soldiers by TPNPB-OPM in Nduga [5 people died]. Meanwhile, at the grassroots level, a number of residents became victims – some died – in a sweeping operation by the security forces, their homes were destroyed, their security was removed, and in the end

the residents fled leading to the number of displaced persons increasing to around 67,000. These are just a few examples; the list is much longer.

The current situation is not the result of one particular incident, such as the case of a pilot being taken hostage. It is the result of a long history. It is precisely during the last four years that the situation has deteriorated drastically. According to our observations as religious leaders, after the racist incident in August 2019, developments were dominated by the application of a scenario that no longer intended to find a solution to the conflict or intended to find out the roots of the conflict (roots of racism, roots of discrimination, roots of marginalization, roots of increased political protest). The intention turned out to be to control the entire territory of Papua and paralyse all political resistance. This scenario is carried out, through real, directed and structured militarization. This total domination is not only revealed through the presence of thousands of additional soldiers from outside Papua, but it is also revealed in the coercion of structural policies such as the revision of Special Autonomy so that it becomes a 'tool of control' for the central government and the coercion of regional expansion which is not based on reasonable scientific considerations or the welfare of the people. In the process, the role of the civil government in Papua has been reduced to the point that it is now disappearing. The process of implementing this control scenario is still ongoing and has been increasingly revealed both in the decision that each new province be equipped with a fully complete Military base, as well as in the deployment of thousands of soldiers in villages (1,200 in West Papua province and 900 in Papua province). They were assigned to "launch the government's development program and to educate the villagers".

Given the trauma that has been growing for a long time due to daily experiences of the Army in the communities, it is not surprising that the people at the village level strongly objected to the policies that the security forces wanted to implement. Moreover, a number of areas were declared of 'combat alert' by the Army.

We, as leaders of the religious community, cannot stop thinking about how the situation that we have briefly described above could have happened. Of course, the current situation is 'man-made', and not a natural disaster. People created it! Of course we condemn all forms of violence and killings by any party, whether TPNPB-OPM, whether the army or the police. How is it possible that Papuan's basic rights are limited to the point of being abolished, to the point where they can be killed? Moreover, more and more innocent people, civilians, have

become victims. It turns out that Papuans can be arrested, beaten, accused of treason without any proper investigation. The proof is that, of the 80 prisoners arrested 'for treason' during the post-anti-racism protest period, not a single accusation could be proven in the trial process. But people were still sentenced, even though they received light sentences. Here are the facts! How is it possible that our citizens are not allowed to speak freely, or peacefully, moreover they are not entitled to hold different opinions, including in politics. This freedom is actually guaranteed in our 1945 Constitution. Why is the 45 Constitution no longer respected in Papua? How is it possible for us to have the official institutions that represent the people, silent and powerless, and be denied a vote if they happen to speak? How can a priest or an ordinary mother be killed in their village, and the perpetrators go unpunished? Many questions confuse us. Why is there no space to openly discuss the roots of our conflict?

The current terrible situation is man-made and therefore the situation also needs to be corrected by humans. At the heart of any approach to a solution is a recognition of the dignity of everyone involved. This is a true acknowledgment of the Papuan people who are not only human beings and who are on the same level as anyone in Indonesia, but also as the 'firstborn' of the Land of Papua who live in harmony with nature and are nourished by the fertility of their land. The land is an inseparable part of their identity. Thus, it is unacceptable that indigenous peoples are casually forced to relinquish their lands. Land is their father, the land is their mother. Without such recognition there is no equality and the risk of domination is always on the doorstep. Therefore it is necessary that the truth be the basis of all our considerations. So far, the process of stigmatization, including the assessment of TPNPB-OPM as terrorists, has continued and there has been a lot of news in the media that has misled public opinion about Papua. It is also difficult for us to accept that truth seems to be one sided, in this case the authorities can only speak truth, while news from ordinary people is categorized as a 'hoax', meaning that it cannot be true. Of course news from the people on the ground is one of the true benchmarks for us, as leaders of the religious community, because they simply talk about their experiences, not about fantasies. The truth is very important to establish together, because it is the key to peace. The Truth is the price of peace. We also think that the situation in Papua can only be resolved if we are all willing to sit down together and honestly analyse the real roots of the conflict. Put aside all rhetoric and political ideology, and be open to see the situation and its background clearly and honestly.

Our strong impression is that today all policies are temporary policies that serve a particular political interest. The incident of the killing of a number of new soldiers became the reason for declaring a 'combat alert' by the Army leadership (actually to our knowledge, only the President can decide this). What we need is a policy that is based on the root causes of the conflict so that it can move towards a solution to the problem, and not just an action against one temporary symptom. During the past four years, which were marked solely by the 'act of total domination' of the territory of Papua and the 'silencing of all political resistance', we have experienced a significant setback on the road to peace in Papua. A number of constitutional rights have been removed and the atmosphere of democracy has declined significantly. These two elements are deeply felt in Papua. So, in the future we suggest to the President and all officials with good intentions, to significantly change the approach to conflict resolution in Papua:

1. Restore all basic Constitutional rights so that they are also respected in Papua [the right to freedom of opinion, including differences of opinion, the right to free assembly, the right to equality before the law, restoring the rule of the civilian government, ending the militarization of villages, withdrawing troops, and cancelling the expansion of the Regional Military Commands]. This restoration is urgently needed to create a more suitable ground for entering into a more focused and honest dialogue about the roots of the conflict in Papua and how to resolve them.
2. An important part to restore the situation should be a focus on those who are internally displaced so that they receive the necessary services they need until they can return to their villages.
3. Request that the President be willing to give a formal mandate to a working group to initiate a 'peace dialogue' with Papua; this working group should not consist of random representatives, but of a number of people who are open, competent and able to analyse objectively without being influenced by certain political interests.
4. As a working partner for the group referred to under point [3], a similar working group should be formed in Papua. The leaders of the Papuan civilian government together with the leaders of the churches can be asked to form the working group.
5. To enable the two working groups to function, all related parties should declare a 'Humanitarian Pause', or the termination of all forms of violence on the part of the

TPNPB-OPM and the security forces. Cessation of armed contact is one of the main conditions towards finding a solution to the conflict in Papua.

- Specifically related to the issue of hostage-taking, we suggest that the negotiation process be carried out by the churches, and that all troops around the location where the pilot is detained be withdrawn back to their headquarters. It is impossible for a negotiation to be carried out where the threat of the authorities is at the door. We can draw this lesson from the experiences of events in 1996 (Mapnduma: the negotiations failed because they were interrupted) and from 2001 (Ilaga: the negotiations were successful, because the Papuan Police Chief supported them 100%). The withdrawal of the security forces in this case is not a 'loss of face' but rather the application of a 'very noble face' because the dignity of every human being is placed above anything else! This is a top priority!

With respect and prayers!

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