

BAPTIST CHURCHES OF AOTEAROA/NEW ZEALAND: AFFIRMATION OF WEST PAPUA INDEPENDENCE STATEMENT

INTRODUCTION:

1. We, the New Zealand Baptist Union, as the whānau (family) of Baptist churches, believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ reconciles humanity with God, one another, and the wider creation (i.e. land, sea, air, flora, and fauna surrounding us) in fulfilment of part of humanity's original calling to image God through the ministry of faithful stewardship of creation (Gen 1:26–28).
2. Because of this calling to faithful stewardship and participation in Christ's ministry of reconciliation, we have a responsibility to acknowledge and support the special relationship that was created by God between the indigenous peoples of West Papua and the natural environment they have inhabited for many thousands of years, as manawhenua (sovereign nations) and kaitiaki (i.e. stewards of their natural environment), prior to the Indonesian occupation.
3. The Indonesian military occupation has led to the well-documented violent deaths of over 500,000 West Papuan people and their dislocation from ancestral lands (see rationale statements below). This ethnic cleansing has, in turn, led to the degradation of the natural environment as a result of mineral extraction and forestry operations that involve partnerships with multinational corporations (also discussed in rationale statements below).
4. Therefore, we the New Zealand Baptist Union, as followers of Jesus Christ and his ministry of justice, hold the expectation that the New Zealand Government will recognize the sovereignty of the Indigenous peoples of Western Papua and uphold their Human Rights as set out in international declarations it has signed. These include, for example, the United Nations' (1948) *Declaration on Human Rights*, and the United Nations' (2007) *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

STATEMENT OF AFFIRMATION:

The New Zealand Baptist Union has developed the following statement with the intention of encouraging the whānau of New Zealand Baptist churches to actively lobby: (a) the New Zealand Government; (b) corporations with vested interests in West Papua; (c) the Government of Indonesia; (d) other neighbouring Pacific nations; (e) fellow Christians and; (f) the wider international community, to recognize the sovereignty of the Indigenous peoples of Western Papua and uphold their Human Rights.

1. We the New Zealand Baptist Union, as a whānau of churches who are committed to the justice of God, express our deep concern at the historical record of Human Rights abuses that have occurred as a result of the Indonesian occupation of West Papua since 1962.

Rationale:

- West Papua's history as part of the Indonesian Republic stems from a U.N. sponsored process which transferred the territory to Indonesia with backing from the U.S. Kennedy Administration. West Papuans were excluded from the negotiations, which culminated in the 1962 New York Agreement between the Netherlands and Indonesia.
- To fulfil the agreement's requirement of an 'act of self-determination', Indonesia conducted the 1969 Act of Free Choice. Numerous eye-witness accounts confirm that the 'vote' was conducted under conditions of extreme duress and threat; including threats to life. Only approximately 1000 people took part in this process which most West Papuans refer to as the 'Act of No Choice'.
- Since the Indonesian takeover at least 500,000 people are estimated to have died in the ongoing conflict, but Indonesian security forces have not been held to account for their actions.

2. We the New Zealand Baptist Union, as a Whānau of churches who believe in humanity's calling as stewards of creation, also declare our deep concern at the ongoing exploitation of natural resources that has followed the Indonesian occupation of West Papua.

Rationale:

- West Papua, along with Papua New Guinea, is one of the most culturally and biologically diverse places on Earth. The island is home to some 1,000 different language groups (one-sixth of the world's total), with 263 found within West Papua's borders.
- Since Indonesian takeover, West Papua's cultural makeup has changed significantly as a result of migration, both sponsored and informal from other Indonesian provinces. Today indigenous Papuans are believed to be a minority in their own land and if present migration continues as planned this marginalisation will become more extreme.
- West Papua has the largest contiguous expanse of tropical rainforest outside the Amazon and among the largest number of endemic species on Earth. It has a snow-capped mountain chain and is one of the few places on earth where glaciers exist in the tropics.

- This beautiful land, spiritually precious to its Papuan communities is also rich in timber, gold, copper, oil, and natural gas: which has attracted the attention of transnational corporations, such as U.S. based Freeport McMoRan Inc.
- Freeport McMoran Inc. operates the world's largest gold mine and one of the world's largest copper mines. Freeport's Grasberg mine sits at an altitude of 14,000 feet in the remote highlands near Timika. The mine is a joint venture between Freeport McMoRan and mining juggernaut Rio Tinto. In 2014, Freeport contributed a massive US\$1.5 billion to the Indonesian state coffers.
- Each day the Freeport mine releases thousands of tons of tailings or waste rock into the Ajikwa River to be deposited in a vast dead zone in the lowlands. The mine is responsible for the displacement of its traditional tribal land-owners and for human rights abuses since its establishment.
- The NZ Super Fund quit its investment in Freeport McMoran citing the involvement of the Indonesian security forces, employed by Freeport to protect the mine, in documented human rights breaches. (See: <https://ramumine.wordpress.com/tag/freeport/>)
- West Papua's pristine forests are being exploited for timber exports, notably the hardwood kwila, still in use in New Zealand for outdoor furniture and decking. The palm oil industry is steadily encroaching on forest land as foreign investors rush to exploit Indonesia's lax land use regulations.

3. We the New Zealand Baptist Union, as a Whānau of churches who believe in our calling to participate in Jesus Christ's ministry of reconciliation, also declare our unwavering support for peaceful methods to persuade the international community (including Indonesia) to recognize and ensure the political independence of West Papua.

Rationale:

- For some years Church leaders from several denominations (including Baptist leaders like Socratez Yoman) have been promoting the concept of West Papua as "A Land of Peace". This is a concept which promotes dialogue between all actors including the Indonesian authorities to work towards an end to violence and long-term solutions.
- Because the territory is largely closed to outside journalists, grave human rights abuses against humanitarian and human rights workers are common, including massacres, torture, arbitrary arrests, and suppression of basic freedoms, all of which often go unpublicised in western media. The December 2014 killing of four schoolboys by security forces in Paniai,

was widely reported, but still the case remains unresolved.

(See: <http://time.com/4880190/papua-poverty-shootings-justice-paniai/>)

- West Papuan resistance groups, both in exile and within the territory, have forged a new unity and the United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULMWP) was granted observer status at the annual summit of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG). The MSG is a coalition of Melanesian nations, like the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, who have expressed their deep concern about the situation in West Papua via diplomatic channels: <http://wagingnonviolence.org/feature/new-hopeful-chapter-west-papuas-50-year-freedom-struggle-begins/>
- As of 2017, some 1.8 million West Papuan people have defied the Indonesian government by signing a banned petition demanding a new vote for the independence of West Papua. This petition was therefore signed by some 70% of the West Papuan population and presented to the United Nations' Decolonization Committee, vice-chaired by Indonesia. The petition was subsequently rejected. (see: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/30/west-papua-independence-petition-is-rebuffed-at-un?CMP=share_btn_fb)

4. As a result of the UN Decolonization committee's rejection of a petition signed by some 1.8 million West Papuan people (and verified by reputable international observers), we the New Zealand Baptist Union, as a Whānau of churches who believe in the freedom of conscience that the gospel offers in Jesus Christ, call upon the New Zealand government to actively join other Pacific nations and proactively use diplomatic channels to support the legitimate aspirations of the majority of West Papuan people.

Rationale:

- In the early 1960s New Zealand supported Dutch plans for decolonisation of West Papua, but it has since accepted Indonesia's sovereignty. While New Zealand rightly raises human rights concerns with Indonesia, it does not take a strong advocacy role and continues to maintain defence ties with Indonesia.
- There is important potential for New Zealand to serve as a neutral third-party mediator as West Papuan church leaders, including Socratez Yoman, have requested.

CALL TO ACTION:

Given our concerns outlined in sections 1 and 2 above, we believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ demands the New Zealand Baptist Union recommend that its members (individually and collectively) undertake appropriate actions to help protect the rights of the Indigenous peoples of West Papua. To that end we recommend that:

1. The following actions be undertaken by the Assembly Council of the New Zealand Baptist Union and the New Zealand Baptist Missionary Society:

- a. Engage with the Asia Pacific Baptist Federation leaders at every opportunity to raise awareness of the plight of West Papuan people, including West Papuan Baptists, and express our shared concern and need for just action. Where possible, utilize New Zealand Baptist Union networks to amplify the voice of West Papuan Baptist in the wider Baptist World Alliance, including, but not limited to, the Freedom and Justice Division.
- b. Utilise New Zealand Baptist communications, both formal and informal, to highlight and educate New Zealand Baptist churches about the plight of West Papua. This includes, but is not limited to, articles in the *NZ Baptist* and *Support Crew* with links to wider online material.
- c. Develop a partnership with other organisations, including, but not limited to, the West Papuan Action Group, to support and advocate the strategies and aspirations of West Papuan people.

2. The following actions be undertaken by Carey Baptist College:

- a. Provide a public opportunity for indigenous leaders of West Papua to speak about their experiences and their aspirations for justice. This could include, but is not limited to, a Carey Conversation that involves indigenous leaders of West Papua and leaders of the West Papua Action Group. Such a public event would be recorded and made publicly available through Carey Baptist College's website and social media platforms.

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