

The Horrors of Timor and Papua

Sr Susan Connelly, RSJ, has been committed for many years to understanding the social, political and economic plight of the East Timorese people and to supporting them in their quest for justice. Of more recent times, her concerns for justice for the peoples of our region have led her to understand more fully the context in which the peoples of Papua and West Papua also struggle for justice.

In the following article, Susan lays bare, with alarming clarity, the details of the strikingly similar struggles of both the Timorese and Papuans and the disturbing ways in which Australia has been silent about so much in the face of such horror experienced by our closest neighbours.

As we read Susan's article at this time of waiting in Advent for the God whose coming among us as a defenceless baby we celebrate at Christmas, we pray that, in their struggles, the people of Timor and Papua might know this God is with them. We pray, also, that we might grow closer to the Jesus who committed his life to the proclamation and establishment of God's kingdom on earth and assimilate his boldness in speaking out, speaking up and doing what we can to support the struggle for justice of those denied it by their social political and economic governors.

Paul Cahill, OCarm, Prior Provincial, Province of Australia & Timor Leste



The Indonesian government and military treatment of the Timorese people was identical to that which the Papuans are now enduring. A comparison of the events of the last few decades in Timor and Papua shows that the Australian silence, support, and in some cases complicity with Indonesia, is similar in both places. ("Papua" refers to the provinces of Papua and West Papua, while "East Timor" refers to Timor-Leste.)



Australia has supported Indonesian claims to sovereignty in Timor and Papua, and has trained Indonesian military personnel who served there. Yet it has consistently declined to comment on the torture and murder of Timorese and Papuans and the assassination of prominent leaders.

Australian support of Indonesian claims:

After the Dutch handed West New Guinea over to the UN, an "Act of Free Choice" was held in 1969 where 1026 selected Papuan chiefs voted at gunpoint for annexation with Indonesia. Australia prevented two pro-independence West Papuan leaders, Willem Zonggonao and Clemens Runawery, from travelling to the UN just weeks before the vote carrying testimonies from many Papuan leaders calling for

independence. They were kept on Manus Island until after the vote.

In 1974 Portugal left East Timor abruptly without any post-colonial preparation. In December 1975 Indonesia invaded, using its fight against communism and colonialism as pretexts. It annexed East Timor as its 27th province, a move not recognised by the UN. Three Timorese leaders left for the UN two weeks beforehand to lobby for recognition of the declaration of Timorese Independence of 28 November 1975 and were unable to return for 24 years. As with Papua, every Australian government upheld Indonesian sovereignty over Timor. In 1999, after over two decades of brutal occupation, the Timorese gained a UN sponsored a

ballot for the choice between autonomy or independence, with 78.5% voting to sever from Indonesia. In 2006 Australia and Indonesia signed the



Lombok Treaty through which Australia

recognises Indonesian sovereign territory, which is held to include the Papuan provinces. Agitation for freedom and investigation into human rights abuses by Australians are viewed as threats to Indonesian sovereignty. In 2007 an Australian coroner's court ruled that five Australian- based journalists were deliberately killed by Indonesian troops in 1975 to stop them exposing the invasion of East Timor. Despite the murderers being named, no one has been brought to account.

East Timor was closed to the world for the fourteen years 1975-1989. In Papua, the Red Cross does not have full access, and journalists and human rights monitors are banned from entry.

Training of Indonesian Military:

Australia ended training of the prominent Indonesian military section Kopassus after the Dili Massacre in Timor in 1991, but it was reinstated. Australia's sale or supply of military equipment to Indonesia continued throughout the occupation of East Timor. Australia currently helps to finance the training of Special Detachment 88, designated to oppose terrorism. This group is active in Papua, showing that Papuan agitation for freedom is considered to be terrorism.

Arrest, torture, detention and massacres:

Widespread resistance to Indonesian rule was followed in East Timor by repression and politically induced starvation in which tens of thousands of people died. Human rights reports on East Timor demonstrate a 24-year period of brutality and the repeated use of violence to crush political opposition. Indonesian security forces were responsible for the systematic torture and ill-treatment of victims.

In 1983 one thousand people were killed in Kraras, in the far east of Timor. In 1991 Indonesian troops fired on peaceful demonstration at Santa Cruz cemetery, killing 400. In 1999 in Likisa 167 people were tear gassed and then killed with machetes. At the Suai Church in 1999 hundreds were killed. The Indonesian military were responsible. In 2005 the [CAVR Report](#) presented to the UN found that between 102,000 and 183,000 Timorese died violently between

1974 and 1999 and that the Indonesian military were responsible for 90% of those deaths.

Since 1969 Papuan people have been murdered, the death toll estimated at hundreds of thousands. 1977 saw the killing by aerial bombardment of several thousand Papuans in Jayawijaya. In 1981 Napalm and chemical weapons have been used against villagers. Many were killed and injured for raising West Papuan flag in Biak in 1998. There were further massacres in Wasior and Wamena. Five teenagers were murdered by soldiers in 2014 in Paniai. Repression of the Papuan people has increased, leading to heightened tensions. Torture of West Papuans has been videotaped and put on the internet for years. One of the latest examples shows a student being terrorised by soldiers using snakes. Demonstrations, flag raising, arrests and killings continued in 2019. Indonesia sent in large numbers of extra troops and cut internet access on a number of occasions. There has been [wide condemnation](#) of the torture and murders of so many Papuans as gross violations of human rights.

Prominent Leaders:

Australia has remained silent on the deaths or imprisonment of Timorese and Papuan leaders. Nicolau Lobato, the first President of East Timor, was killed by Indonesian military in 1979. David Alex was a prominent resistance leader who was tortured and killed in 1997. Xanana Gusmão, leader of the armed wing of Fretilin, was arrested in 1992 and jailed for seven years.

Theys Eluay was one of the original Papuan chiefs



who voted under duress for annexation. He became increasingly resistant to Indonesian rule and was abducted and murdered in 2001. Kelly Kwalik was an influential independence leader killed in 2009, one of the many leaders arrested and killed over the years.

The Australian support of cruel Indonesian regimes in Timor and Papua is difficult to square with claimed values such as the *fair go* and talk of under-dogs and battlers. It does square, however, with the enormity of Australian Indigenous history, and the chilling treatment of recent boat refugees.

FOR YOUR CALENDAR – DECEMBER

28 November – Timor Leste Independence Day

29 November – School Strike 4 Climate

1 December – West Papua National Flag Day

1 December – World AIDS Day

2 December – International Day for Abolition of Slavery

3 December – International Day of Persons with Disabilities

10 December – Human Rights Day – Adoption of United Nations Declaration of Human Rights

18 December – International Migrants Day

20 December – International Human Solidarity Day

23 December – 1996: Wik High Court Decision



Restoration of Independence Day 28th NOVEMBER

After centuries of rule by colonial Portugal, Timor Leste declared its independence in 1975. Portugal showed little to no interest in trying to keep its colony, which is when Indonesia invaded and annexed Timor Leste as its new 27th province.

The desire for independence never died in Timor Leste. Finally, in 2002, the long-fought-for dream of a free East Timor was finally realized. While 20th May is Independence Day, on 28th November celebrations will include a public holiday, many attend mass at cathedrals, the soldiers who defend the nation are honoured, there is a presidential inspection of the troops at the palace, followed by a flag-raising ceremony, and then follows a “party” that lasts well in to the day.

WHAT CAN YOU DO to SUPPORT the CAMPAIGN TO FREE WEST PAPUA?

- **Copy** a graphic of the flag and send it electronically.
- **Can you** put it on your email, or social media, and anything for other public use.
- This could be especially for **December 1**, but it could go through the **whole of Advent**.
- **The combination of the prayer and the action** is sufficient - easily focussed on, and do-able by us all.

West Papuan National Flag Day - 1st December

On this day, the Morning Star flag (the West Papuan National flag) was flown for the first time officially beside the Dutch Tricolor. The Dutch were finally about to give the West Papuan people their freedom.

However it is one of the great tragedies that at their moment of freedom it was cruelly crushed and West Papua was basically handed over to Indonesia in 1963.

Fifty eight years later, the West Papuan people are still struggling for their right to self-determination. Supporters around the world on the **1st December raise the West Papuan flag** in a show of support for the West Papuan people.

As individuals we can also contribute to raising awareness about West Papua on the 1st December.

There are many simple actions to help raise the issue of West Papuan in the minds of the Australian public -

<https://awpasydneynews.blogspot.com/2019/11/west-papuan-national-flag-day-1st.html>



Prayer for the People of West Papua AND Timor Leste

*We see them walking, walking.
Sorrow in one hand, hope in the other.
May we walk with them in spirit,
May we also be a visible hint of God's promises
So each step we take together
Moves us all closer to the Incarnated Body,
The Reign of God that we create
For all members of the human family,
Walking, walking, walking
On the journey to justice.*

Jane Deren, adapted from a prayer in
Education for Justice