

**RECONCILIATION AND PEACE BUILDING**  
**WEST PAPUA CONTEXT**

**A presentation at a Workshop on**  
**THE ROLE OF CHURCHES IN HUMAN RIGHTS**  
**ADVOCACY**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Before we start reflecting on elements required for reconciliation and peace-building in the Papua context, we should dwell for a moment on a very brief description of the background to the actual problems in Papua. For this background I shall just quote from another paper I have written recently<sup>1</sup>.

## **I BACKGROUND**

### ***1.1. Basic attitude of the Papuans***

First of all it is worthwhile to note that the Papuans have a very fundamental attitude, namely the desire to "regulate themselves". Throughout their history, which spans many thousands of years, Papuans have proven to be able to regulate themselves in order to maintain their existence. In their recent history, this fundamental attitude has also been shown by the Papuans to everybody and whatever agency that indicated any tendency to reduce their chances to regulate themselves. Such an attitude was shown in their encounter with the Dutch government, missionaries, traders and newcomers in general. It was not surprising, therefore, that any agency that sought to "control" the Papuans usually resorted to violence. In view of that fundamental attitude, it was also not surprising that December 1, 1961 was written with golden letters in the pages of Papuan history, as at that time the Dutch government gave a perspective that was very agreeable with that fundamental attitude, namely initiating "the process of freedom". The loss of such perspective in an international political game in the 1960s left a deep scar in them.

### ***1.2. Three factual elements***

While bearing the above fundamental attitude in mind, special attention should be given to three factual elements that also underlie Papuan problems today:

#### **1. Collective "Memoria Passionis", or "memory of suffering".**

The painful experiences had their sources in:

- a. the development policy followed by the Indonesian government over the last 38 years;
- b. the occurrence of dozens of human rights violations in Papuan territory during its integration in the Republic of Indonesia;
- c. the behaviour of the Indonesian armed forces in this territory, commonly marked by arrogance and a high-handed show of power.

#### **2. Events during modern Papuan history, such as:**

- a. The program toward freedom initiated by the Dutch Government on December 1, 1961 by (1) nominating representatives of the local community to 50% of the total members of *Nieuw Guinea Raad* (Parliament); (2) flying the Morning Star Flag beside the Dutch flag; and (3) socializing the national anthem "Oh My Land, Papua".

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<sup>1</sup> "The Problems in Papua", a paper that served mainly the presentation of the problems in Papua by Catholic Church leaders to President Abdurrahman Wahid, on June 27, 2000.

- b. The adoption of the New York Agreement (NYA) of 1962 as the basis of transfer of *Nederlands Nieuw Guinea* from the Dutch to the Indonesian governments. This basic agreement was taken without the participation of Papuans themselves in the negotiation.
- c. The Determination of People's Opinion (PEPERA, known in English as The Act of Free Choice) in 1969 was implemented incorrectly as it was accompanied by intimidation, coercion, torture, and a unilateral interpretation of conditions of the implementation that was laid down in the NYA.

**3. Public protest has not been heard nor responded to seriously by the central authority, thus**

- a. The Papuans have never felt that their dignity and identity as real men and women were recognised;
- b. The Papuans have never felt that they were acknowledged and protected as full citizens with full rights and obligations, as provided in Paragraph 4 of the Preamble to the Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia (the 1945 Constitution).

***1.3. Silence because of helplessness***

The sufferings summarised above finally produced a community which was bitterly disappointed and deeply frightened; a community which felt isolated and which was abused and usefull only as an object of projects, and which had been forced to hold back its anger for so many, many years. It is quite natural that one day this "memory of collective suffering" would finally reveal itself and become a source of "strength in the struggle", once the opportunity arose.

**II KEY ELEMENTS TO RECONCILIATION**

Any effort towards reconciliation should respond to the background of Papua's problems as summarised above. This entails the effective strengthening of the following elements:

- The feeling of the Papuans to be in charge of their life
- The internal power to move slowly from an emotional approach to a more rational one
- The restoration of self-confidence and self-appraisal
- The public expression of the truth
- The obtainment of (social) justice, hence structural change
- The promotion of peaceful dialogue

The bottom line: Reconciliation should help to restore respect for HUMAN DIGNITY, as expressed in Article 1 of the United Nations Declaration: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights (*and obligations; tvdb*). They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood."

### **III BASIC ATTITUDE IN RECONCILIATION AND PEACE-BUILDING**

The ministry of reconciliation is not a neutral one and is not served by neutrality; it is based on a fundamental consideration that human dignity must be accommodated, defended and fought for. Without this consideration as a vital demand, any effort towards reconciliation is bound to fail.

This means that the aspiration of a whole people demanding that their dignity and freedom be respected must be accepted as fact, and not denied or minimised. This aspiration is at the very heart of the people and almost the only thing on their mind at the most basic level of the community. Hence the urge to talk about the problem of freedom and dignity, and to deal with it. Accepting that priority is a first condition to keep in touch with the people.

In the Papua context it means that we have to opt to get involved in the process toward “M” (merdeka; being free) – we must be involved with and be committed to the restoring of dignity.

How to define the freedom we would like to move towards? There can be important differences of opinion here. For the time being, and as ‘an outsider’ I would like to articulate the freedom-concept as: “free from all forms of suppression and oppression” (that is, the individual must be fully respected in terms of his/her dignity as a human being). Whether at the end of the day this freedom might be expressed in an independent state or by a federative political status (or some other political construction which really serves the main purpose) is for me still open for discussion, and in the end, not up to me to decide on.

### **IV RECONCILIATION-ACTIVITIES**

Any effort towards reconciliation needs to be assessed on its relation to the main values mentioned in above section:

- [1] participation; being in charge
- [2] self-confidence and self-esteem
- [3] truth telling
- [4] the realisation of justice
- [5] dialogue, and
- [6] peace

These vital requirements are more demanding than is often realised. In several workshops with pastoral (church) workers it became very clear that church-community leaders often have difficulties in involving the local community - giving them responsibility and trusting them. This is especially true for pastoral workers who are originally from outside Tanah Papua.

A first step towards reconciliation might be to create room for storytelling in a hospitable setting; it helps people to get their feelings out and at the same time provides the experience of being accepted. Note the dramatic transformation of atmosphere achieved by Jesus in his meeting with the disciples after his death (cf. John 21,1-17).

Related to restoring self-esteem is the need to get the stories reported. This reporting is one of the main tasks ahead for us and aims directly at the need for the truth will be told in public. It is our experience that people of the far inland in Papua feel more confident (to speak up) after their suffering has been made initially public and after institutional support (for instance by the church) has become clear to them.

By the same token, within the “Freedom Movement” as well truth-telling must mean passing on the right information. As an example I would like to draw attention to the confusing messages and signals delivered recently by the leaders of the Papua Presidium concerning international support for the movement. While any objective observer knows that hardly any foreign government<sup>2</sup> is either ready or eager to support the movement, local leaders still keep telling people that international support is secured.

Truth telling is mainly connected with getting the stories into the open; especially about all the kinds of deprivation and suffering which must be related before moving on to the next step: getting justice done. There will be no reconciliation if no justice is done; there has to be a kind of touchable/visible moment of justice, whatsoever the measure agreed on. In this context it is still a very urgent task to push the authorities to get serious in the legal handling of cases. The principle of non-retroactivity which has been adopted by the MPR in its most recent session is bad news for everybody, as it means that perpetrators may go ‘free’. It shows an unacceptable contempt for all the victims of violence in the past.

For any sustainable improvement, there must be a structural transition, in order to prevent the possibility events in the past being repeated in the future. It refers to all kind of elements, as for instance, the abolition of the “military zone status of Papua” (way back in October 1998) should have been followed by withdrawal of all non-regular troops from Papua. This hasn’t been done up till now!

The transition is a huge job, as it must deal with social and political power-structures. Indonesia anno 2000 is a ‘living example’ of the difficulties to be tackled on the road of real change. Even the example of a human tragedy in East Timor has not prevented a new tragedy in Maluku; can it prevent another tragedy in Papua? People losing power are hard to satisfy, it seems, and they don’t mind resorting to violence and abandoning any respect for human values and human dignity. Still, violence only will generate violence, and therefore the task to keep a dialogue going and to keep peace as the deciding basis for all actions is still the key element in any ministry for reconciliation. Slowly building up a culture of peace, while accepting the frustrations that pave its road, is our task.

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<sup>2</sup> So far only two small South Pacific countries (Vanuatu and Nauru) have expressed support.

## **V INSTRUMENTAL TOWARDS RECONCILIATION**

### **V.1. Socialisation of the concept and the need for reconciliation**

The concept of Reconciliation is still widely missing in Indonesia (and Papua); indeed over the last year a Truth- and Reconciliation Commission has been discussed, but a 'legal' battlefield has arisen from the effort to develop and adapt the concept for what is needed in Indonesia (and Papua).. There is even a danger that setting up such a commission will persuade many people (among them NGO-activists) that the problem would be solved.

In brief, there is still a lot to be done to get the mere concept of reconciliation developed and socialised, including in church-circles. Especially the church-circle should be a main target group as the ministry of reconciliation is, in my opinion, a key element in pastoral care. Another necessary target group is the circle of "human rights activists"; it is my personal conviction that advocacy activities, without the deeper perspective of looking for a way out and improvement of the future, risk becoming sterile and only partly responsive to the real needs.

### **V.2. Insight in traditional expressions of reconciliation**

In line with the socialisation of the concept of reconciliation itself (its comprehensive and rich contents can be discovered at the same time), special efforts should be undertaken to gather information on existing traditional forms of reconciliation. I am convinced that there are many valuable reconciliation practices in the traditional culture, and they might be the appropriate form(s) to use to get the reconciliation process started.<sup>3</sup>

Looking for traditional forms of reconciliation might be also the proper way to get a lot of people interested and involved in the process. Participation by a large community might be the effective way to create the setting for dealing with the past in a 'natural-cultural' setting.

### **V.3. Dialogue and training among activists**

In line with the remark above, a substantial dialogue and also training have to be started and pushed for among the activists involved in human rights issues. More than just advocacy needs to be taken care of if human rights organisations opt to offer healing assistance to the community. For the time being the human rights organisations in Papua lack the expertise to handle this special part of their vocation, hence it will have to be built up together. Included in this might be the familiarity with processes like conflict resolution and such. In the end human rights

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<sup>3</sup> See *special attachment no. 1*: "Some points concerning traditional reconciliation practices in West Papua", by Alexandra Szalay.

In another *special attachment no. 2*, there is a rough outline of a workshop on reconciliation. See paper: "Kerangka Refleksi atas Permasalahan Sosio-Politik serta Proses Menuju Rekonsiliasi", oleh Theo van den Broek ofm, Jayapura, April 2000.

organisations may become the main trainers in conflict resolution for people in the field, including pastoral workers.

#### **V.4. Creation of friendly places**

Creation of 'safe houses' (hospitable centres; "Posko-Posko Perdamaian") on local level where people can meet and talk in peace and without feeling threatened, in my opinion is the best, very simple way to start any peace-building and reconciliation process. Especially church organisations especially should feel committed to this kind of activity. It might be a small group of people gathering, it might be a special location set up, it might be 'under the tree', it might be an organisation which creates special attention for the stories everybody is bearing with him/her; there is room and need for many initiatives.

#### **V.5. Get the story out and justice pushed for**

It can not be doubted that publishing accurate reports of all form of suffering in the past is still greatly needed. Quite a few activities have been developed over the last years; still a lot must be done, especially documenting the past and analysing underlying structures of oppression. Accurate and well documented reports are the main basis for demanding legal follow-up and effective justice.

#### **V.6. Intermediating between conflicting parties**

The whole history of suffering is marked by parties in conflict. Although there is a "hell of a job" ahead, efforts have to be made to get conflicting parties onto speaking terms. This is very important also within the development of the Movement to Freedom itself, as differences of opinion are often identified with 'being an enemy'. At all levels – internally in the community, as well as externally between the community and third parties – a mediating role is both greatly needed and very urgent. It is the only way to get a dialogue functioning and to open up perspectives for a solution.

Especially concerning the actual people's movement, Foreri has been put in place to do that part of the work, but it must be admitted that it failed. Based on experience like that, it might be necessary to find churches (people in the church, or a special small organisation within the church) ready to pick up this crucial role.

#### **V.7. A pilot project**

We have hardly any experience of how to deal with the reconciliation process. We can study it, but it might be very worthwhile as well just to start practising it while learning from it. Would it be too ambitious to start a pilot project of reconciliation in Biak? I choose this area as it still preserves a kind of homogeneity in terms of ethnic composition, as well as from the point of view of 'a collective memory of suffering'. Ontop of that it is a strong church-related community and geographically limited.

**IN CONCLUSION**

These remarks have been put on paper in a hurry, and I realise that a lot has to be added before we will have a practical as well as a qualified concept of reconciliation which can be used in Tanah Papua. I only hope that my remarks will trigger off some discussion and will help to give birth to additional and substantial contributions towards the process of creating respect for human dignity.

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***Special attachment no.1***

Some points concerning traditional reconciliation practices in West Papua  
by **Alexandra Szalay** (23 August 2000)

In all of the cultures and belief systems throughout the world, the need felt by humans to reconcile – following war, death, catastrophe – is dealt with by ritual. What the ritual entails can vary greatly, but three common elements are public speech (for example, a call to prayer or silence, an obituary or summary of events), ceremonial gestures (for example, the laying of a wreath, the flying of a flag at half-mast, in Sydney recently on a national day towards reconciliation, the crossing of the Harbour Bridge to the place where Europeans and Aborigines first met), and always, the sharing of food.

An example of this on a global scale is what happened at the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich when snipers killed Israeli athletes. The event horrified everyone – not just the other athletes, the officials, and the German people – but ordinary people around the world. The correct thing to do seemed to be to abandon the Games altogether. But there were thousands of young athletes who had trained for a great deal of their life for this one occasion; and the Olympic Games are very much a business – there was the economic consideration as well. What could be done? In the end, the Games were stopped for a day while there was a remembrance ceremony, and people everywhere – regardless of their race, faith, or politics – prayed, or gave their time in a period of silence, or made their own small remembrance ‘ceremonies’ in homes, schools, and offices.

The fundamental point about humans’ ritual responses to conflict is that these ceremonial observances have an implicit, shared meaning that can be participated in by, and so unify, whole communities. They serve the essential purpose of allowing life to go on when everything seems to be in disorder.

There are a number of small, subtle ways in which Papuans traditionally ‘reconcile’ with one another. You have probably observed some of these yourself among people from the highlands, for they are still practiced there. When two Dani men meet after a long absence, for example, they loosely hold one another’s wrists and weep while telling the story of all that has happened while they have been apart. The tears they shed are spontaneous, but they are not an affectation. In the intervening period, they have lost kin (sometimes to the security forces) and inevitably this has had an effect on their clan’s affairs. Shedding the tears, face to face, is an undeniable expression of their commitment to the ties that bind them. These ties, after all, are the staff of Papuan life.

Because Papuan ties of kinship are extraordinarily broad (they span not just the immediate or extended family, but extend to people unrelated by ‘blood’ from the same place, the same language group, and even the trade group their father or

grandfather knew), the ways in which they mark ceremonial occasions are widely understood.

Another 'reconciliation' gesture you will have noticed the effect of among highlanders is the amputation of a finger joint. However 'cruel' or 'inhumane' this gesture may seem to outsiders, it formed a traditional, permanent expression of deep sorrow and group membership among peoples whose social relationships span far and wide.

In New Guinea (both West Papua and Papua New Guinea), ceremonies of 'reconciliation' were usually associated with traditional warfare. These took the form of compensation for deaths in war. Payments of traditional valuables such as stone, shell and pigs addressed these crucial human losses, as well as marked the close of a period of scarcity, tension, and fear. During war, gardens are neglected, trade is disrupted, pigs are subject to theft, and, of course, people's lives are lost in ambush and battle.

The war compensation ceremonies enabled the public resolution of conflict, the redistribution of wealth that had been 'locked up' during the period of warfare, and following on from these, the cementing of new alliances.

The main features of these ceremonies were the bringing together of communities (men, old and young, both politically important and economically inconsequential, women and marriageable girls, children); the assembly of vast quantities of food (which often took months of preparation, because gardens needed to be made); the making of speeches by both sides, in which past events were recounted, back and forth, and new declarations were made; and many days of feasting, dancing, gossiping, and courtship.

A central element of such ceremonies was (and is still) the exchange of pigs; either live animals or their meat. In the West Papua context, this factor presents us with a major difficulty in looking at ways in which Papuans and non-Papuans can reconcile with one another. It is perhaps one of the cruellest twists of human history that has put a country made up mostly of followers of the faith of Islam in charge of a people who value what is utterly abominable to Muslims – pigs and pork.

Yet history has also given us some precedents to work from. When the Dutch explorer, H.A. Lorentz first encountered a fringe people of the southern highlands in 1907, his face and hands were daubed with the blood of a freshly killed young pig. Lorentz (who had trained in law) didn't understand why it was done, but he realised that it was important to the people, and in the interests of peace and mutual regard he ordered the Muslim carriers accompanying the expedition to also submit to the procedure. To their credit, they did.

The reason why the people (who we think were Nduga) did this is complex, but it is linked to the value of pigs to the people: they are animals that take a great deal of effort to 'grow' and they are the principal item with which social alliances are validated, even today. The outsiders were unknown, and their intentions were unknown. With the application of the blood of a pig to their bodies, the outsiders could be 'cleansed' of what was unknown or potentially harmful, and incorporated by the people into their group.

This incident, by the way, was not an isolated one. When other European explorers reached the interior in the 1920s, the same kind of ceremony was done in a number of other places.

Today in West Papua, pig and vegetable feasts still occur and in character they are much like the ceremonies of the 'traditional' past. When Muslim guests are expected to attend, the people, respectful of what they know of Islamic belief, bring in chickens to serve as a feast food for the outsiders.

But chickens are recent arrivals; they were introduced with contact and they are not traditionally valuable. There is little, if any, pride associated with owning a chicken. If a ceremony of reconciliation between Papuans and non-Papuans were to take place, it would have greater meaning for Papuans if they could organise the ceremony in a way that was a customary expression of pride for them. It is Papuans who, really, are the party in need of an occasion of sincere, public redress for past wrongs.

Discussion with the people themselves will lead to ideas about appropriate ways of doing this. The older people, especially, will be a valuable source of ideas, and it would help if they could have the concept explained to them in their first language rather than bahasa, and if they could give their answer in that language. The coastal peoples will have differing ideas from the mountain peoples. If pigs are involved, they will feature in far greater numbers in the highlands communities.

It is probably a bit much to ask non-Papuans to strip off their clothes, be daubed with ochre and adorned with other traditional decorations, and sit on the ground round an earth oven and receive huge chunks of pig meat while long speeches are made recalling past injustices. Yet if any part of this did happen, it would not only be amazing, it would go a long way, I think, towards meaningful reconciliation.