

**“Papua as a land of peace”:  
a journey towards conflict solutions in Papua\***  
J. Budi Hernawan ofm

**Introduction**

Following the inauguration of the new province, *Irian Jaya Tengah* (Central Irian Jaya) in 23 August 2003, Timika, the proposed capital of the new province, was torn by a bloody conflict between the proponents for and the opponents of the decision. A few months earlier, in a letter to President Megawati, the spiritual leaders in Jayapura (Pemimpin Agama-agama di Papua 2003) had warned her for such a potential conflict as a consequence of political instability following the Presidential Decree of January 2003 accelerating the division of the Province of Papua into three new provinces. In a similar vein, some human rights NGOs (*Cenderawasih Pos*, 24 February 2003), Governor Jaap Solossa (*Cenderawasih Pos*, 21 February 2003), the Provincial House of Representatives (*Cenderawasih Pos*, 8 February 2003) raised their concerns. However, the government ignored the concerns until the incident occurred. This is not only a recurrence of violent incidents but also illustrates the pattern of conflict in Papua which is marked by a disjunction between government policy and complex realities in Papua.

This paper examines the nature of current peace initiatives encapsulated in the phrase “Papua as a land of peace” in dealing with the conflict in the region. To do so, first it will summarize the root causes of the conflict. Secondly, I will discuss peace initiatives which are manifestations of the jargon as well as responses to the conflict before concluding with some important remarks.

**The root causes**

Post the New Order era, it is not unusual to publicly discuss the root causes of conflict in Papua, a homeland for 2,1 million people (the 1999 national census) consisting of 42% migrants and 58% indigenous Papuans who live in an area as large as 422,000 sq km. Such discussion attempts to explain the sensitive question: “Why Papuan people want independence?” Three core issues are considered as the root causes of the conflict (Office for Justice and Peace 2000). *First*, the historical and political questions of the transfer of power from the Dutch to Indonesia administrations in the late of 1960s. The Second Papuan Congress 2000 argued that the transfer was unlawful as only 1,022 Papuan representatives voted to integrate to Indonesia whereas the 1962 New York Agreement stipulated that the plebiscite should have been done under the principle of “one man, one vote” so that the Papuan people demand a review over the UN resolution on the adoption of the result of the 1969 Act of Free Choice. Moreover, they insist that in 1961 they had gained independence (Broek, Hernawan, Korain and Kambayong 2001: 273) when the Dutch administration provided them with key national symbols: the

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Morning star flag, *Hai Tanahku Papua* (Oh, Papua My Land) as the national anthem, and the House of Representatives (Saltford 2002:11).

As a response to this position, the Indonesia government has repeatedly asserted its sovereignty over Papua and the whole country emphasizing the historical roots of the country back to the Majapahit era in the thirteenth century to justify the continuity of its cultural and political relationship with the region (Indonesian Permanent Mission to the UN 2003:9). Furthermore, the government stresses the legality and reality of the 1969 Act of Free Choice as it was unanimously ratified by the UN General Assembly resolution no 2054 (XXIV) on 19 November 1969 (Indonesian Delegation to the UNCHR 2003). Therefore, both sides are at odds in dealing with the lingering question and seems unprepared to be involved in any negotiation.

The second part of the problem derive from the recurrence of gross human rights violations. Since the so-called reformation era in Indonesian politics, the civil society organizations, such as *Sekretariat Keadilan dan Perdamaian* (SKP or the Catholic office for Justice and Peace) has documented 27 unresolved cases across the province (Hernawan 2003). It was not until the year 2000 that the National House of Representatives promulgated Act no. 26 of 2000 (UU 26/2000) on the Human Rights Court which gives real power to the judicial system, particularly the National Commission on Human Rights (KOMNAS HAM), to address gross human rights violations. However, none of the human rights cases has been brought to the Human Rights court.

*Finally*, the third part of the problem is a welfare issue. As a province endowed with rich natural resources, Papua has contributed large portion to the Indonesian economy. As an illustration, PT Freeport Indonesia which has mined gold and copper since 1967 was the largest single taxpayer contributing US\$180 million a year during 1991-2001 and the source of over 50 percent of Papua's GDP (Blair and Phillips 2003:51). Despite the large revenue contributed to Indonesian economy, the province is ranked the second poorest province in Indonesia. Furthermore, the literacy rate for women is 44 percent compared to 78 percent in the rest of Indonesia; and for men, 58 percent compared to 90 percent for the whole country. Only 10% of the Papuan people have a high school education and only 1 percent has graduated from college (Blair and Phillips 2003:74-75). This illustrates serious lack of human resources which subsequently has caused injustice and resentment across the province to the government.

As a response to this issue and through highly complex processes, Act no 21 of 2001 (UU 21/2001) on Special Autonomy for the Province of Papua was promulgated as an attempt to address these injustices and inequalities and improve the living-condition of Papuans. Under this provision, the provincial government is expected to increase its budget allocation by threefold from Rp. 800 billion (US\$ 63 million) to Rp.2.5 trillion (US\$277 million) plus the other Rp 400 billion (US\$ 45 million) funds from the central government and Rp 770 billion (US\$86.5 million) from the share of revenues (ICG 2002:8). However, this step was stalled following the Presidential Decree no. 1/ 2003 on the division of the province into three new provinces which bypassed this

provision and sparked uncertainty to the authority and power of the incumbent provincial government (Franciscan International 2003) and recently flared a bloody conflict in Timika. More importantly, the central government plans to amend the Act (*Cenderawasih Pos*, 30 August 2003).

Having followed this description, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the origins of the conflict are highly complex resulting from the triangulation of historical and political, human rights and welfare issues. However, the state has not created mechanisms that enable all stakeholders to deal with these protracted problems.

### **Peace initiatives**

Recent peace initiatives attempt to deal with the root causes of conflict in Papua. The first peace initiative, *Forum Rekonsiliasi Masyarakat Irian* (FORERI or Reconciliation Forum for Irianese People), was established in 24 July 1998 by civil society organizations, including three major church leaders, representatives of women groups, representatives of *Adat* groups and representatives of university students. This establishment was a response to the tense situation in Papua following the *Morning Star* flag raising in several regencies which met with harsh repression from the military and the police even though it was in the midst of democratic spring across Indonesia. The main idea of this forum was to create neutral space for dialogues between the state and the people to deal with aspirations for independence. This forum facilitated several dialogues between the state and the people in Jayapura and Jakarta and culminated in the historic meeting in the Presidential Palace between 100 representatives of the Papuan people (Team 100) and the President B.J. Habibie and his cabinet in 26 February 1999. This meeting struck the elite in Jakarta when Tom Beanal, the chair of the team, clearly asked for independence as the only solution for the protracted problems in Papua. President B.J. Habibie dismissed the meeting saying that Team 100 should go home and reconsider their statement. Therefore, instead of engaging in further discussion, both sides made no effort to clarify or understand each other.

Along with the political development of independence aspirations, a few of the founders of FORERI engaged with and play a key role in the struggle for independence. In the statement of *Musyawahah Besar Bangsa Papua* (the Papuan Deliberation) February 2000, the Papuan Presidium Council states that they will use peaceful dialogues and democratic ways to gain international recognition from the Indonesian government and other nations (Broek, Hernawan, Korain and Kambayong 2001:270). This position was echoed in the statement of the Papuan Congress in June 2000 which also marked by the diffusion of the phrase "Papua as a zone of peace". These processes contributed to the diminishing role of FORERI in promoting peace and creating neutral space for dialogues.

However, the idea of peace and dialogue inspired some academics, NGO activists, support groups, politicians and Papuans in exile to establish the West Papua Project in January 2000 under the Centre for Peace and Conflict

Studies of the University of Sydney with its principal aim to promote peaceful dialogues between the people of West Papua and Indonesia. This project reports that it gained some key achievements, including organising a conference and workshops, networking and partnerships with key representatives of the Indonesian government in Australia, identification of key issues in developing peace in Papua, and outlining future plans (Rees, Ondoawe and King 2003).

The withering FORERI was replaced by the establishment of a Peace Task Force headed by Dr Benny Giay (a theologian and anthropologist) in July 2002. This group, which was sponsored by ELSHAM, an influential human rights NGO, held a conference on peace for Papua in conjunction with the provincial House of Representatives, the Governor and the Police in 15-16 October 2002. "Papua as a zone of peace" was defined during this conference which encompassed most stakeholders, including politicians, NGOs, women groups, adat groups, religious leaders and the police (ELSHAM 2002) despite the refusal of the military to participate. This conference defined the zone of peace in three component (1) a situation whereby the Land of Papua and its people feel free from physical and psychological conflicts, (2) all policies have to adopt to the social and cultural conditions in Papua, and (3) it has to be formulated in a law. Moreover, the conference proposed the establishment of a Peace Commission which would be responsible for promoting peace in the province (ELSHAM 2002:39-40).

In a similar vein, the further development of peace initiatives was organized by SKP which held a workshop on peacebuilding in Jayapura, 25-30 November 2002, covering major stakeholders, excluding the Papuan Presidium Council, the military and the police. This conference aimed at reaching a deeper operational understanding of the components of peace culture resulting in the identification of a variety of conflict sources and the key components necessary to build a culture of peace in Papua, including harmony, communication, sense of security, justice and truth, tolerance and respect, self-reliance, welfare, togetherness, recognition and self esteem, and participation (Office for Justice and Peace 2002:3-4). This program was followed up by some activities, such as inter-faith prayers for peace in Jayapura, to mark the International Day of Peace.

While civil society organizations in conjunction with the House of Representatives, the Provincial government and the Police, promote the idea of peace and dialogues through several peace initiatives, these efforts are often disrupted by continuing violent incidents in different areas in Papua. Therefore, there is a big question whether or not all initiatives helps to prevent the people from prolonging conflict.

### **Some concluding remarks**

To answer this question, there are some points that should be emphasised. First is the nature of peace initiatives. The chronological account of the current peace initiatives illustrate a strong commitment by civil society organizations to build culture of peace and create space for dialogues. These dynamic processes are marked by strong involvement of the elite level of Papuan

society, including religious leaders, NGO activists, academics, and politicians. These groups obviously play a key role in stimulating peace processes, embracing the provincial government, the police and the provincial house of representatives, fostering the idea of peace encapsulated in the phrase of "Papua as a land (zone) of peace". However, such initiatives have met with the resistance of the military to participate in the processes which most likely have strong influence to and sometimes disrupt the progress of such initiatives.

Secondly, even though peace initiatives have been formulated and structured by the elite of Papuan people, this group represents the grass roots which support its initiatives. However, it is hard to see ongoing processes of peace initiatives in grass roots level because of the networking issues and logistical problems. Some key initiatives have identified the issue of participation or inclusiveness but need to develop mechanisms that enable the grass roots with an enormous diversity to play a key role in the processes.

Thirdly, despite the fact that the primary agenda of FORERI was to deal with the violent incidents, this agenda conflated with the political agenda of the independence promoted by the Papuan political leaders. This impression is strengthened by the involvement of *Adat* leaders in the Papuan Presidium Council which is hard to avoid a suspicion that peace initiatives are merely a pretext of political struggle for independence. However, such an impression is not entirely accurate because most of the founders of the FORERI, such as church leaders, women's groups and NGO activists, remain independent and separate from the political movement for independence.

Finally, despite all contribution of all peace initiatives to prevent continuing conflict or violent incidents, these efforts seem fragmented and uninstitutionalized because civil society organizations in Papua need to develop their efforts through ongoing conversations with the grassroots which they represent. Such dialectics need to be done in the future to build an integrated peace initiatives towards open-ended solutions of conflict in Papua.

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