

Reverend Peter Woods was on a visit to West Papua, when he encountered a protest on the way to an appointment at the Cendrawasih university. "There were wounded people, including children. Children had been shot by the army," Reverend Woods told BULB. Among those beaten was the university's law and politics lecturer Franz Kapissa who Woods had been going to visit.

It was February this year and five hundred students and academics were protesting against multinational mining operations, and deeper grievances concerning the continued occupation of West Papua by Indonesia, when they were confronted by a hundred-strong police-backed army advance firing tear gas and bullets into the air. At the end of the day, five members of the security forces and sixteen students were dead and dozens injured.

Escaping the ensuing reprisals from army militias, 200 students ran to the thick jungle which in the very same week, world nature scientists were declaring to be a 'Garden of Eden' after discovering more than forty previously unidentified species of plants and wildlife. The students have been in hiding ever since.

For the students that did not manage to escape, a horrific fate awaited them. Reverend Socrates Sofyan Yoman, a Papuan Baptist Church minister spoke of the murder of one of them. "Police came, arrested him and tortured him and then cut his stomach and brought him to hospital. When I got the report from the hospital, we took his body and I buried him. Nobody came, his father and mother, his close family and relatives didn't come because they were scared."

A lush, jungle-covered island separated from Australia to its south by the Coral Sea, New Guinea comprises the independent nation of Papua New Guinea in its eastern side, and the occupied Indonesian province of West Papua in the west. The island is inhabited predominantly by tribal communities, whose way of life has remained largely unchanged since the Stone Age. In West Papua alone there are more than 250 tribes, each with their own language and culture. Between them they speak 15% of the world's languages.

Since being annexed by Indonesia in 1963 under its vision of uniting all the former colonies in the region, the native people of West Papua have borne witness to the gradual dilapidation of their resources, systematic erosion of their cultural heritage, and the genocide of over four hundred thousand of their people at the hands of army and militia.

A UN instigated 'Act of Free Choice' in 1969, where West Papuans were to be given a free vote on whether to remain a part of Indonesia, descended into farce. In the end, one thousand tribal leaders were rounded up and forced at gunpoint to vote in favour of integration.

"My people are suffering terribly" says Benny Wenda, exiled West Papuan tribal leader and international lobbyist. "All we ask for is the same right that you take for granted. The right to self-determination so that we can be free from the bondage of this brutal Indonesian rule."

Before his escape to exile, Benny was a community leader and activist living a traditional tribal life in the highland region of West Papua. His village was bombed by British supplied Hawk jets, and his family and villagers raped and murdered by Indonesian army and militia. Imprisoned on treason charges, he managed to escape, and fled to a refugee camp in neighbouring Papua New Guinea, and eventually to the UK where he now runs the Free West Papua Campaign.



As with East Timor, where Indonesia's occupation was driven by a desire to exploit their huge offshore oil reserves, Indonesia's interest in West Papua is primarily economic. Freeport, the world's largest goldmine run by American multi-national company Freeport-McMoran, is located in the south-west of the province.

The Indonesian government draw more than one billion dollars a year from the mining operation there, yet the West Papuan people remain amongst the poorest in Asia. The huge open pit is situated on lands traditionally belonging to the Amungme tribe, and its crushed tailings weave a muddy scar through the forest, choking the sacred Ajkwa River, causing environmental devastation.

Following the murder of their independence leader Theys Eluay by Indonesian special forces in 2001 – a 'special autonomy' process implemented by Indonesia to appease the West Papuan people has done little to quell uprisings. Last year two West Papuans were given ten and fifteen year jail terms for raising the independence flag and refusing to recognise themselves as Indonesian citizens. This year army and militia intimidation and brutality towards students and operations within the jungle region have increased. The Indonesian Embassy in

London refused to comment on the examples of human rights violations put to it by BULB.

As a result of the clamp down Australia recently gave asylum to forty three West Papuan refugees, prompting Indonesia to recall its Ambassador, accusing Australia of supporting the West Papuan separatist movement. As recently as 1999, Australia sent troops to East Timor to quell the genocide being carried out by retreating Indonesian forces. This time, however, in an apparent attempt to appease Indonesian authorities Australia responded by confirming that they fully support the territorial integrity of Indonesia and agreed that they would not give home to future asylum seekers. Herman Wanggai, one of those granted asylum in Australia after a perilous four day sea crossing in a wooden canoe, said. "In West Papua the situation now is very risky, because the military is taking over every where. They come to the university to find out who are the activists."

Horrific incidences of ethnic cleansing, including the massacre of over 500 Papuans on Biak Island at a flag raising ceremony in 1998, have gone

uncovered largely by Western media, due in part to a ban on foreign journalists entering the region.

Meanwhile, the UK continues to sell arms to Indonesia, despite recent revelations that British military equipment is being used against civilians. When questioned at a recent meeting in London about reported brutality towards West Papuan protestors using British supplied water cannons, Margaret Tongue of the Foreign Office justified Indonesian actions, saying that Indonesia was entitled to use reasonable force to maintain public order.

More information on the ongoing situation in West Papua can be found at www.freewestpapua.org or www.infopapua.org



occupied paradise

As Tony Blair declares Indonesia an ally in the War on terror on his recent visit, officially putting Indonesia's responsibility for 100,000 deaths in East Timor in the past, Dominic Brown visits an island which Indonesia still occupies and systematically loots using terror, while Western leaders turn a blind eye.

