

**Testimony of Benny Wenda, President of the United Liberation Movement for
West Papua for the Permanent Peoples Tribunal, June 2024.**

- **Early life and Military invasion:** In 1977 the Indonesian military suddenly appeared in my village. Before this I had not known Indonesia but now we had to deal with daily military checks. The military were extremely brutal and often tortured people and raped women. One day, I was just a small boy, I was walking with my mother, my auntie, and cousin, when we were stopped by some soldiers. They ripped my two-year-old cousin from my auntie's arms and threw her to the ground. They told my auntie to wash her face and look beautiful, and then they raped her in front of my eyes. My mum was screaming, she was beaten with a gun and fell down. I couldn't do anything to stop it. Three of my aunties died from rape and other trauma at this time. My two-year-old cousin died two weeks after this incident.
- **Life in the bush:** After my tribe rose up against Indonesian invasion in 1977, the military bombed my village and other villages in the Baliem valley. Thousands of my people were massacred. We were forced to flee into the forest and we stayed there for six years, until 1983. My leg was badly injured by an Indonesian bomb and because we fled into the forest, it went untreated; I still have an injury and limp due to this. During our years in the Bush, we lost many more family members to military violence. There was not much food or shelter. Eventually, we were forced to surrender by the poor conditions and in order to do so Papuans had to carry an Indonesian flag to the local military post. My family were the last to surrender.
- **Racism in school:** after this, I went to school in Wamena, where I was one of only two Papuan students in the class. I had a very profound experience of racism here. I sat next to an Indonesian settler girl and smiled and greeted her respectfully. In response, she told me I smelled and spat on me. I thought 'maybe I really do smell', so that day I bought soap and washed myself with it three times. The next day I sat next to her again and greeted and smiled at her. She stood up and spat on me again. Only then I understood it was really racism: I got up and shouted, 'You think that because I am black and Papuan I am dirty? I have eyes, I have hands... I am human, just like you!'. Papuan students were described as stupid and primitive and dirty, because we wore the Koteka [penis gourd] and ate pork. The Indonesian military had launched 'operation Koteka' to 'civilise' us and force us to wear trousers instead of traditional clothes.
- **Police brutality:** some of my worst experiences were having moved to Jayapura, and seeing police and military beating Papuan men simply for having beards or dreadlocks (rasta dress). This could be in the market, shopping centre, or in the street; police brutality, harassment and intimidation was simply a fact of everyday life.

- **Papuan Spring:** After Suharto fell, in the early 2000s Papuans across the country went out on the streets and raised the morning star openly for the first time in decades. Everyone was so proud to be West Papuan – we had not even been able to say the word Papua under Suharto. The people had confidence and things were opening up. But in response there was harassment, intimidation and massacres in every corner of West Papua. The Biak massacre, where Filep Karma and others raised and defended the Morning star, is the most infamous, but there were massacres in Wamena, Abepura, Timika, Manokwari, everywhere.
- When Megawati took over there was bloodshed everywhere. Suddenly, we could not raise the Morning Star at all, and there were arbitrary arrests and torture in the street, in public, whether you were sitting on a bus or a taxi. You could be stopped at random and Beaten. Many people were tortured after being arrested or imprisoned. Torture and abuse go hand-in-hand; people who were beaten were often called ‘monkeys’, or ‘stupid’. Racism was everywhere, just a normal part of everyday life. And if you wanted to complain, who would you complain to? Prosecutors, courts and police are all part of the occupation regime. There is no fairness or justice in the Indonesian legal system. Small crimes, like stealing a chicken or eggs, could be punished with years in prison. Raising the morning star would give you 10, 15 years in prison. But if Indonesian generals commit atrocities, they will be quickly released and even greeted as heroes back in Indonesia. The soldiers who killed Theys Eluay, for instance, were released after six months.
- **Environment:** I visited Timika in 2001 and 2002 and saw what the Freeport mine had done to the Aikwa River. The river was like coffee, thick and grey. For miles around the river and environment were poisoned by toxic tailings. The local people whose livelihood depended on the river, on the fish, how are they supposed to survive? When they eat the poisoned fish, toxins get in their body, and their skin becomes itchy, dry, and starts to peel off. And the tailings go directly into the ocean, damaging the coral, damaging the trees on the route, killing all marine life. When Freeport offers to compensate for the damage by planting trees, they are not planting original, native tree species. They are not natural to the local environment, they do not work together with other species. This is what I mean when I say ecocide and genocide go together in West Papua. Our people depend on the environment. When their fishing and hunting grounds are destroyed, their rivers are poisoned, their sacred mountains are torn up, how do they survive? Corporations who collaborate with the Indonesian military to destroy our land are not just operating in the middle of a genocide, they are also indirectly or directly contributing to genocide. West Papuan blood is on their hands.