

Evidence by Dr. Jim Elmslie, West Papua Project, University of Wollongong, NSW, Australia on the demographic transition underway in West Papua.

I would like to thank the Permanent Peoples Tribunal for the opportunity to present evidence on the demographic changes that have occurred in West Papua over the last five decades. While some of the figures are over a decade old, due in part to the difficulty in sourcing contemporary data, they clearly show the demographic trends underway, and the consequences of this transition.

While the proportion of Papuan people as a percentage of the entire population of the Papuan provinces continues to decline, this process varies widely between different regencies. While some have a strong majority of non-Papuan people other regencies are still overwhelmingly Papuan. This dichotomy is closely linked with topography – the mountainous interior outside of urban areas having a Papuan majority and the accessible lowlands a non-Papuan majority. The consequences of this dichotomy – a large chunk of West Papua about the size of Great Britain is peopled almost exclusively by Melanesian people, even as some of the coastal regions become non-Papuan majority– is profound. West Papuans of the interior have not only survived Indonesian occupation but have kept their lands and cultures largely intact, which continues to underpin calls for an independent West Papua and conflict with the Indonesian government and its security forces. While coastal regions continue to receive large numbers of non-Papuan migrants resulting in the increasing minoritisation of the Papuan people and their concomitant militarization, marginalization and dispossession. This process is also occurring in the highlands from expansion of the oil/gas sector and mining sector; the proliferation of new regencies (with new bureaucracies) and the continuing development of new roads, all of which alienate traditional land and draw in migrants.

The Importance of West Papua to Indonesia

The territory of West Papua (the Indonesian provinces of Papua and Papua Barat) makes up about 24% of Indonesia's total landmass but contains only 1.7% of the nation's population. It is also Indonesia's richest region in terms of natural resources with the largest extant tracts of rainforest in south-east Asia; vast oil and gas reserves, and possibly the world's largest deposits of copper and gold. Indeed Papua's giant Freeport Mine is the largest economic entity in Indonesia and the country's largest taxpayer.

The economic exploitation of these resources, especially in the establishment of massive oil palm plantations (millions of hectares are underway or planned), and the economic opportunities that arise from a fast growing local economy has drawn in hundreds of thousands of migrants from other regions of Indonesia motivated by self-interest and previously by government sponsored transmigration programs. The migrants differ starkly from the indigenous (mainly Christian) Melanesian inhabitants of West Papua, being light skinned Asians predominantly of the Muslim faith.

The demographic transition now underway wherein new migrants have become the majority in many regencies is one of the underlying drivers of conflict in West Papua and is fueling the widespread desire for independence amongst the Papuan people.

West Papuan Demographic Transition

In a series of papers since 2006 I have examined the demographic transition that has taken place in West Papua following Indonesian takeover in 1962-63, and especially since the census of 1971, which found the total population of 923,000 as being 96% Papuan and only 4%, or 36,000 people, as non-Papuan¹. The basis of this argument is that the non-Papuan sector of the population is growing faster than the Papuan sector due to large scale inward migration of non-Papuans from other parts of Indonesia and the vastly substandard living conditions of ethnic Papuans, including high infant and maternal mortality rates, that cause a lower overall fertility rate.

The population of West Papua continues to grow and the percentage of the population which is non-Papuan also continues to rise. This is a driver of conflict: newcomers take resources such as land, forests and minerals from traditional land owners; the Indonesian security apparatus continues to grow to maintain control over the territory and resource extraction in particular; Papuan people are further marginalized and lose even their basic freedoms of speech and association, and so Papuan discontent at the Indonesian occupation also grows and with it the desire for independence. Therefore understanding the demographic transition that is underway is central to comprehending the nature of the conflict in West Papua.

My previous analysis determined that the long term annual growth rate for the Papuan population was 1.84% and that of the non-Papuan population 10.82%² for the period from 1971 up to 2000. From my calculations this meant that indigenous Papuans comprised about 48%³ of the entire population of West Papua (Papua and Papua Barat provinces) in 2010. The figures received from the BPS are from the 2010 census and identify the inhabitants of Papua province as either Suku Papua (Papuan tribe) or Suku Bukan Papua⁴ (non-Papuan tribe). According to these figures out of a total population of

2,883,381 in Papua Province, some 2,121,436 were Papuan (73.57%) and 658,708 Non-Papuan (22.84%), the remainder being unknown. The BPS figures for Papua Barat show that the total population is 753,399 of which 51.49% is Papuan⁵.

Besides any deliberate Indonesian government policy there are several other possible explanations for the confusion over the Papuan population growth rate and the subsequent total Papuan population and they lie in the uncertainty of the data collected by BPS over various census periods. I have derived my figures from the 1971; 2000 and 2010 censuses and extrapolated growth rates from the changes in population numbers between censuses. It is very possible that:

- The 1971 census was inaccurate due to the recent takeover of Irian Barat (as the territory of West Papua was then officially designated) by the Indonesian military; the relatively loose state control over a vast and wild country and the limited resources of the Indonesian state apparatus to conduct such a census.
- The 2000 census was inaccurate due to the widespread turmoil that was unfolding across much of Eastern Indonesia in the wake of the fall of President Suharto and the subsequent independence of East Timor. In West Papua militia and other groups were active and the Indonesian state apparatus was again poorly equipped to undertake such a huge process as a census across the vast and restless stretches of West Papua.
- The 2010 census may well be accurate, although given that West Papua remains a very large and relatively undeveloped region with low population densities spread throughout very rugged terrain where a low level insurgency still continues it is highly likely some groups were not included. It is also possible that groups of Papuans were included who had not been included in previous census (which could go some way to explaining the rapid increase in the number of Papuans).
- Anecdotally there has been an incentive for the local regent (bupati) and other local leaders and politicians to inflate the number of people in villages and tribes to leverage more resources from the provincial government – funds allocated for health and education services for instance. This may or may not have had an effect on census data.

Besides actual difficulties in data collection there are also assumptions embodied in the data that may impact the outcome – either intentionally or unintentionally. For instance Table One shows the average annual population growth rates for Indonesian provinces going back to 1971 by decade. For Papua (and previously Irian Jaya Province) the growth rates have been 2.31% (1971-1980); 3.46% (1980-1990); 3.22% (1990-2000); 5.39% (200-2010) but just 1.99% for 2010-2014. This last figure is an estimation as censuses are conducted every ten years. This is counter intuitive as the population growth rate has been growing for four decades in a solid trend, inward migration of non-Papuans into Papua has been strong in recent years (not least due to massive development in the oil

palm sector that has brought in many workers), and there has been rapid growth in (non-Papuan dominated) urban areas.

Together the above points mean that the data provided by BPS must be used with a degree of caution. It is highly possible that Papuans who missed out on earlier censuses due to their isolation were included in subsequent censuses as the strengthening Indonesian state apparatus and modern communications and transportation improved the efficiency of BPS field operatives. It is also quite possible that the numbers of Papuan people living in remote regions have been inflated to secure more government funding (and electoral advantage).

The basic finding that the non-Papuan sector of the population is growing faster than the Papuan is sound, but with great regional variance. The projection that the non-Papuan sector of the population would come to dominate the Papuan sector and comprise a majority is correct in certain regencies, but clearly not yet happening in other regencies, especially in the highlands. The non-Papuan sector of the population now clearly dominates the richest areas and the urban centres of power, with all the benefits that brings such as education and health services.

One region where the demographic transition has been well researched is Keerom, where non-Papuans made up around 60% of the population in 2010 (this figure would be significantly higher in 2017). From being 100% Papuan in 1963 the authors' predict on current trends that the Papuan percentage of the population will fall to 15-20% within the next decade or so¹¹. The Papuans are systematically discriminated against by having manifestly inferior health and education services, greatly reduced access to sealed roads, piped water and electricity and have lost large areas of land to migrant 'land grabbing' for both small scale agriculture and large scale oil palm projects¹². Besides the racial divide the two populations are also divided by religion – Papuans being predominantly Christian and migrants predominantly Muslim. Fear and mistrust characterize relations between the two communities. As migrants continue to encroach on Papuan land tension continues to simmer

Another region where non-Papuan domination has already become entrenched is in Merauke Kabupaten, in the southern region of Papua province, where the Papuans comprised less than 40 percent of the population in 2010 (this figure would be lower in 2017). This is a region where huge oil palm development is proceeding as part of the Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate (MIFEE). Millions of hectares of plantations are underway or in the planning stages – all on land taken from traditional owners, often under coercion and with little or no compensation.

Ethnic tension in Merauke is high and minor incidents, such as traffic accidents, easily escalate into violent stand offs where the (predominantly non-Papuan) police side with the migrants. There are reports that police are also arming migrants, who are fearful of the Papuans' 'primitiveness'¹⁶ and believe them to be uncivilized and violent. Further exacerbated by religious differences this situation is a powder keg contained only by a repressive military and police presence. It is a situation where everyday life is one of oppression and misery for most of the Papuan population who suffer the indignity of being an occupied population: having their traditional lands stolen; discrimination in employment; very poor levels of health and education services and no basic freedoms of expression and association. Violence meted out to Papuans suspected of supporting 'separatism' is swift and ranges from beatings, incarceration and torture to extrajudicial killings. The police and military act with impunity and the legal system is effectively an arm of the security apparatus.

Concluding Comments

The fact that only relatively small numbers of migrants have moved into the highlands regions of Papua and Papua Barat means the highland Papuan groups, such as the Dani and the Mee, are not in imminent danger of becoming a 'small and rapidly dwindling minority', even as their lowland brothers and sisters suffer that fate. Migrants are increasingly drawn to the economic advantages, and relative safety, of the lowland regions where they can work on oil palm plantations or 'own' their own small agricultural blocks, as well as work as traders, public servants and participants in the rapid economic expansion that is underway. These opportunities are more limited in the highlands but growing as new regencies are created and new roads and settlements built, and as mining and oil/gas projects proliferate.

While some regions are Papuan dominated and others migrant dominated, regions such as Sarmi, Biak Numfor and Jayapura (rural) still have a Papuan majority but are receiving large numbers of migrants. If these trends continue they will end up in the same pernicious situation as the migrant dominated areas where the Papuans become marginalised and their future existence is put in peril.

The consequences of these new findings are profound:

- The Papuan people living in regencies such as Sorong, Merauke, Jayapura City, Keerom and Mimika are already a minority and are set to become further marginalized as non-Papuan migrants continue to arrive to work in the agricultural sector and pursue other economic opportunities. Non-Papuan migrants clash with the Papuan population due to loss of traditional lands; discrimination in

employment, health and education services; religious tensions, and by the increasing suppression and human rights abuses inflicted by Indonesian security forces, especially in response to perceived 'separatist' activity. This is set to continue and grow as more non-Papuan migrants arrive, fueling ethnic tensions and laying the ground for violent conflict.

- The Papuan people living in regencies in the mountainous interior of the country are still the overwhelming majority. The relatively small number of non-Papuan migrants in these areas are involved in trade, civil service, the construction industry and the security forces. While new roads, airports and industrial developments are underway, large numbers of migrants will only arrive when economic opportunities are present, such as oil palm or other plantations (where possible); mines; gas and oil fields are expanded or other projects are established. It seems likely that this will occur, at least in some areas, as the economic imperative driving development reaches ever further into remote areas. Conflict over such resource development and the ongoing security response with 'sweeping' operations and military reprisals seems likely to continue under current Indonesian government policies. The situation can be described as ongoing insurgency which is now characterized by non-violent resistance on the part of the Papuans demanding not just their basic human rights but also that of self-determination, bolstered by rapidly growing international support, particularly from the small Pacific island nations such as Vanuatu.
- Given the above the conflict in Papua Province (and West Papua Province) will only grow short of a fundamental shift in Indonesian policy including: the recognition of traditional land ownership rights; ceasing militarization and military impunity; respect for the fundamental human rights of free speech and association; progressive education, health and employment opportunities, and the emergence of political organisations that adequately reflect the interests of the Papuan people. At this stage such policy shifts by the Indonesian government appear unlikely.
- International support for the basic rights of the Papuan people is growing rapidly with a goal of taking the issue to the United Nations, having (West) Papua put back on the Schedule of Non-Self Governing Territories and, ultimately, having the flawed 1969 Act of Free Choice, whereby Indonesia gained sovereignty over the region, revisited. These figures mean that the 'problem' of West Papua will not be resolved any time soon by the effective minoritisation of the Papuan people, at least not in the highlands. On the contrary large portions of the Papuan people retain their lands and cultures intact and are quite capable of both having an open and honest vote on their integration into Indonesia, and, given the chance, functioning as an independent nation.

The process of settlement by recent non-Papuan migrants in the territory of West Papua is far from uniform. On the contrary most of the migrants have settled in the coastal plains and urban centres while the vast highlands regions remain populated predominantly by Papuan people. However the highlands regions will be increasingly attractive to migrants as the Indonesia government pursues aggressive economic development policies

including creating new regencies (and their concomitant bureaucracies); building roads and developing mineral; oil/gas and forestry resources. While the Indonesian government claims that accelerated development will help resolve Papuan grievances against Indonesian rule the opposite is likely as the Papuans get left behind in the development process in favour of non-Papuan migrants; they become further marginalized within an Asian Muslim society, and their traditional lands are forcibly taken over by government or commercial interests. Therefore it looks likely that the changing demographic make of West Papua will continue to fuel conflict into the future.

Thank you.

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