



**DEBATE: Should West Papua be independent?
Melbourne University Debating Society v Monash Association of Debaters**

**SAMPARI FORUM FOR WEST PAPUA
ACU ART GALLERY, 26 Brunswick St, Fitzroy (Melbourne)**

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As much as principles like sovereignty and self-determination are important, and as problematic as the Act of Free Choice was, we think it's more important in this debate to look practically at what West Papuan independence may look like in the short to medium term. What I'm going to do in my speech is discuss each of the pathways towards independence that are available at the moment, and explain why each of them in their own way are to some degree problematic. You'll be hearing later from our speakers, for instance from Zoe, about alternative pathways for the future of West Papua which could also help to improve human rights and improve representation, but still operating within the framework of Indonesian governance.

So what pathways are actually available for West Papuan independence? We think it's really important in this debate to acknowledge that Indonesia does not support West Papuan independence, and under no circumstances at the moment are they willing to allow that region to separate and become an independent country. We've seen that played out again and again in terms of cracking down on rebel groups and other measures like that.

But we also think it's important to realize that there isn't a great deal of international support for an independent West Papua from the international actors that matter in terms of being able to place pressure upon Indonesia to change their actions or being able to provide international recognition through international forums. If we look at Australia for instance, Australia signed the Lombok Treaty in 2006 with Indonesia, which explicitly recognizes Indonesia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and explicitly agrees not to recognize separatist movements. We've seen that play out even further in recent months in terms of Indonesia that Australia pressures other Pacific states not to pursue support West Papua's independence. And that's something that's in Australia's interests to follow through, given that the cooperation that is often requested in terms of dealing with border security and other issues.

If we look for instance at the United States, we see that the US-Indonesian Comprehensive Partnership is based primarily upon respect for Indonesia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Furthermore, if we look at a number of other Asian countries in the region, we see that many of them are signatories of the Bangkok Declaration, which explicitly recognizes the sovereignty of other signatory nations and their right to put their sovereignty and economic development ahead of civic and political rights. We see that not only are many of the economic powerhouses of the region, like China, Japan, Korea and Indonesia, not only are they signatories to it, there are also

other regional actors, like Taiwan, Malaysia and Vietnam have explicitly agreed to recognize and respect Indonesian sovereignty. What this means is that none of these states have any sort of incentive to go off and recognize West Papuan independence. As much as the Pacific Islands Forum providing some sort of recognition is to see degree important, they don't have the ability to go off and put trade sanctions on Indonesia, or withhold aid and other financial support like many other countries do. We don't see in the short to medium a political climate that is conducive to placing pressure upon Indonesia to recognize independence.

If we were to look at other non-peaceful pathways, we also believe that revolution isn't currently something that is in the pipe works. At the moment we see many independence groups disarmed, and currently there is no large military structure or resources in place to throw out any sort of Indonesian presence there.

But let's set all that aside for a moment. Let's look at if we could somehow set up an independent West Papuan state, what are some of the problems there that would still exist and would still need to be addressed. We think firstly and most importantly there is the recent issue of transmigration, which now means that roughly fifty per cent of the four-and-a-half-million people in West Papua are not members of the traditional Melanesian population. Rather they've immigrated there, or are recent descendants of people from other areas of Indonesia. So the question becomes what happens to those more than two-million people who are now in West Papua if it is an independent state.

A couple of options are available and neither of them is particularly satisfactory. The first is looking at re-location. We think that going off and trying to re-locate two million people when you would be taking away about one-fifth of Indonesia's landmass is something that is hugely problematic, given that you already have two-hundred-and-fifty million people living in the region. If you were to go off and allow the Indonesian population to remain but grappling full democratic participation, you would still end up with West Papuans as an ethnic minority within their own country. Alternatively if you were to set up special provisions and representation for ethnic West Papuans, you still have that problem of creating an under-class of citizens with limited access to the civil service and limited access to education and other resources. That's what we've traditionally seen play out in other countries such as Malaysia, where you go off and prioritize certain ethnic minorities over other particular groups.

Furthermore you also create an increased justification for continued Indonesian intervention in West Papuan affairs. What we see around the world, is that many countries, the most obvious recent example being Russia's attitude towards Crimea, there is often an incentive to intervene, by sending military forces in or interfere with their foreign affairs, because you know that there are ethnic members of your community in that country who aren't necessarily being granted equal rights and equal protections. For West Papua to be free of Indonesian intervention, allowing the population to remain there is something that is hugely problematic.

We also know that there is likely to be an economic detriment to West Papua should they be granted independence. What we know is that outside the resource sector new states often have a poor ability to attract foreign investment. And the reason for that is when foreign companies move into a country they know that they are operating within a particular political framework and a particular legal and taxation framework. And that doesn't exist in West Papua at the moment. And foreign investment is necessary for not only for bringing revenue to the region but also in terms of creating job opportunities and infrastructure development. We would worry that West Papua independence would for instance jeopardize the ongoing sustainability of the Grasberg mine, which is the world's largest gold mine and third-largest copper mine. At the moment under the Special Autonomy Law we see that 80% of taxation revenue stays within West Papua. The ability to go off and implement a taxation regime is necessarily reduced when you remove the Indonesian influence from that area.

On the negative team today we are not against principles of sovereignty and self-determination, but we do think it is important to look up the practical consequences and what is lost out when you remove the framework that the Indonesian government already has in West Papua.