



**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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TRANSCRIPT: EXPERT PANEL

Q: How is Australia implicated in this situation?

BISHOP HILTON DEAKIN. First of all I'm not an expert on this at all, but I am an observer of what goes on. I have never been to West Papua except from the other side in Papua New Guinea, and got out again fairly quickly. But I have spent many years in East Timor so I have a very certain taste of the processes that go on. Now if I may say so I enjoyed this debate. I won't say anything about the man who is making it all possible, but keep it up.

I say this only because I've been in it for sixty or seventy years. Don't let us tell the West Papuans what they should do. Let us discuss it. Let us see it if we want as a problem for Australia, for the West Papuans, for the Indonesians, and for anybody else if you want. But somehow or another let the West Papuans be the people who want to tell us what they truly want. And you won't find it just by going up and saying 'Hey Jacob, what do you really want?'. He's only one of them. You've got to listen. Listen, listen, listen. And talk. Read of course, and discuss, but don't come up with solutions. The solutions have to be what the West Papuans want. I make that as the first point that I really want to make.

Another interesting point I want to make before I get around to this comment about Australia. One of the things I was looking for in the debate, and it didn't come at the beginning, but towards the finish and then fell into place with one or two of the speakers. I think one of the most important features about what is going on in West Papua—it's not the only one, it's just one of them but a most important one—is the economic factor. No one said, for instance, that at the western end of New Guinea there is more oil and gas than there is in the Timor Sea. Nobody ever talks about it, but the Indonesians know about it, and they are building ports and arranging facilities for refining and all the rest of it. Now that is the inheritance, if I may eulogize in a way, that nature gave for the West Papuans to have to build their own nation if they want to.

Another thing is that West Papua has one of the richest forest areas in the world. And guess who's woken up to it? I think the Indonesians have, they're not stupid at all, but the Malaysians are the people that are picking the eyes out of it. Not too much is being said, but that's being taken away from the West Papuans as well. If you are going to have the sort of state that requires the jobs and the growth Mr Turnbull and others in this country talk about, you've got to have these natural resources to build on. So there needs to be a very close analysis of that.

I'm an anthropologist. I used to teach it at the university. I think the cultural matrix that's there in West Papua has to be very carefully understood if you want to understand what the needs of those people are and what their desires and wishes will be. Don't give them a western one, and particularly don't give them the hollow one that the Australians reckon they can give. So there are three warnings.

Now in terms of Australia: what I have experienced over twenty-five years going into East Timor every year for a month or so, and Australia has got a dreadful reputation in East Timor. Don't believe what you read in the papers. Don't believe John Howard. That was all a game. Peter Cosgrove didn't fire a gun except at some of his own soldiers who were disobeying him. The East Timorese went through hell, and they are still picking up bits of bones. When I went in there a week after the end of the war, and went down to the bottom side of East Timor, to places like Suai and Same, I walked through whole fields that were three times as big as the MCG. Do you know what I could see? Bones. Smelt corpses and blowflies. Hundreds of people who'd been put to death; shot and then tried to be burnt. This was part of the heritage, and it stays with you until you breathe your last. And it will happen also with the West Papuans if things turn out that sort of way. They are the sort of things that require the wisdom of the ages, and also especially I think, the humility of us to see these people as our brothers and sisters with whom we can work. If they want freedom, yes. If they don't want freedom, tell us what they want. I have no idea. But they think they want peace and happiness in a tribal setting ... probably, I don't know. One has to go there and find out and ask the experts on all these sorts of things.

Australia? Australia is still having a very bad, sad, and rotten record with East Timor. In a small way I'm fighting for the maritime boundaries changes that should be between Australia and East Timor. You know, right throughout the world, except in Australia, right throughout the world boundaries between nations that are maritime are straight lines, down the middle. It's everywhere. It's not a law, it's an international practice that probably has been sanctified because it has happened so often. But Australia won't do it. They have a boundary that goes something like this, and guess what's in that? The oil and the gas that is East Timor's but which is coming to Australia. Of course, Australia being Australia says 'We've been very generous with you East Timorese people'. I'm not sure on figures just now, but it's something like this. "We've got forty million out of that basin, and we've given you four. Now that's very good." The forty million should have gone to East Timor, the whole jolly lot of it, but we're not allowed to say it. I'm deeply ashamed when I do go to various meetings to discuss the points about this. Particularly the top political figures in this country I am ashamed to listen to them when they talk about foreign affairs and the maritime boundary system between Australia and East Timor. Believe me, if that's the way it's been for the last twenty years, it's going to be similar when it comes to West Papua, because that's the only example we've got to read. So we've got to think, and re-think all of this and develop a sensitivity and maturity that I don't think at the present time exists. Now they're only reflections, no more than that, and there's no collection after this.

Q: Has West Papua got a chance in hell if they decide to take the military path?

LANCE COLLINS. The question was whether Papuans have got a chance in hell if they take the military path. I just want to pause on that for a moment. First of all I'd like to thank the debaters today. That was a splendid performance. Well done all around. My only comment is that if you are addressing an international audience you might slow down the delivery a little bit in a couple of cases, because Australians tend to speak very quickly, and even more quickly when we are under pressure—except a former prime minister who had trouble getting words out when under pressure.

Before moving onto future West Papua, I want to talk a little bit about the independence of East Timor. That happened at a moment in time. For the twenty-four years of the Indonesian occupation from 1975, there was a veil of secrecy drawn over East Timor. And two states in particular were complicit in that. One was Washington, Washington being separate from the American people; and the other one was Canberra, Canberra being separate from the Australian people. And what brought down that three-ways agreement to continue the Indonesian occupation of East Timor was the Asian financial crisis of 1997. That shocked a number of Asian countries, starting with the Thai baht, and then went on to the Indonesian currency, and it put a stagger through the entire Indonesian system. And in that moment in time the East Timorese resistance was capable enough and organized enough, and had a foot in the door at the UN where they were able to give the push for self-determination a big shove. And because they had that window of opportunity it actually worked.

For some of the questions that were raised tonight about how a move to independence or for self-determination would go, what I can attest to, having been a witness to it, was the very remarkable goodwill of people from a huge range of countries under UN auspices that did their best to make it work. I would echo the Bishop's comments about how risible Australia's role regarding East Timor has been since over the seabed boundary and so on. But internationally, when there was a moment in time, the international community will step up to the plate on the issues of human rights and self-determination.

Moving onto West Papua. West Papua is again situated in time. When it was originally occupied by Indonesia the world population was something like three billion. It was at the height of the post-World War 2 rise of capitalism, which has gone on unchecked now for seventy years, but the strains are beginning to show. We've had one global financial crisis, people say others are coming, and the results of upset there has been indicative of what could happen. And just as no one saw the 1997 crisis coming and the affect that it had on Indonesia, no one can really predict what is going to happen internationally in the future.

So for West Papuan self-determination, the opportunity could come and be fleeting. The record of death speaks for itself. 183,000 killed in East Timor, either killed or died of malnutrition or

famine. No one really has an idea of the number of people who have died in West Papua. The figures range from one hundred thousand which seems conservative, up to half-a-million.

So any sort of out-and-out war there would be very bloody. But the key to it is to keep on with, I believe, the non-violent resistance, because with the advent of the internet and a more globalized counterculture rather than a corporate culture, we are starting to see successes; in Standing Rock, the stand-off in the United States at the moment between Native Americans and corporations over a pipeline, and in countries like Papua over traditional lands.

So the future is hard to predict. Two points that I would want to make. The resort to arms would be a last resort because it would be bloody, particularly without international humanitarian intervention. The second point is that on human rights and self-determination alone, when the opportunity arises, the world will step up to the plate. Thank you.

Q: I'd like to hear a bit about the autonomy process. Because my observation was that although it's promoted to help give West Papua some form of independence, it really has been a process of indonesianization especially as it's been associated with the transmigration. I think we need to know something about that, and the failure ... well not only the failure but the deliberate policy that promoted this autonomy but was really something very different.

ISAAC MORIN Thank you. First of all I would like to thank the two teams. This is a real reflection of what's happening in West Papua. There are two groups. The groups that would like to go through Special Autonomy, and the group that would like to go straight to independence. So this is really reflecting what's happening there.

Regarding Special Autonomy. It was started in 2001 by Megwati Sukarnoputri. But it failed the first time, because it contained a clause that says a Papuan representative body, the MRP, had to be instituted first. This organization should have been developed before West Papua was divided into two provinces (in 2005). But the first failure was Megawati's, because she divided West Papua into two—Papua and Irian Jaya Barat (which is now called Papua Barat).

The problem was that they suspect Special Autonomy as a golden way, as a golden gate, to reach independence, because Special Autonomy was produced by Papuan academics and Papuan elders while walking around Papua for three months to get the ideas of the people, and they produced Special Autonomy. But Special Autonomy was suspected not by the common people but by the security sector. They said this must be a way out for independence, so they don't agree to fully apply this Special Autonomy. So that's what's happening now.

Special Autonomy should be for twenty years. Now it's 2016 and the dateline for evaluation is in four years time. But the problem is it has failed. When SBY became president [in 2009], he knew that Special Autonomy had already failed, so he formed a Unit for Acceleration of

Development in Papua and West Papua. But that also failed. So when Jokowi began president, he disbanded this organization and he is using his own approach, which is focused on infrastructure development—even though some Papuans do not like that kind of approach.

When SBY became president, he asked the Indonesian Research Institute (LIPI) to do a very comprehensive research, in an academic way, not in a political way, but in academic way. And they did it. One of the lead scholars was Muridan from the University of Indonesia. He has already passed away. He was working on this with Professor King from Sydney University, who has also passed away. They designed a road-map for West Papua which was based on the research. But Muridan said in The Jakarta Post that when he presented the results of the research, SBY's inner circle didn't accept the result. They said the result was so academic, so they don't like to respond to the results of the research.

So once again, in West Papua there are two groups. But both of them actually want to reach independence in a peaceful way instead of violence.

Q: I lived in West Papua for five years, and since 1983 I have been back another four times, and I have not met one West Papuan who wanted to stay with Indonesia. They all wanted independence. But what we see on the ground in West Papua is a lot of very active student groups, we see military in some of the jungles, whether it's in the island or Yapen, or in the highlands, or in Biak. But we don't see a lot of mass protest. We don't sit-ins, or strikes. There are lots of reasons for that, and it may be because of a fear of repercussions, because people do disappear, they get assassinated, and families are intimidated.

Isaac, perhaps you could just make a comment upon that, just in terms of where you think the majority of West Papuans are. The old people have suffered a long time and perhaps are really tired. Maybe they want it, but they don't have the energy to push it through, or to sacrifice anymore. Or is it that they have given in, and are saying 'Well if it happens it happens, and we'll leave it to Jacob and a few of you outside to make it happen. Or is there a simmering resistance that is like a lid on a boiling kettle. And it will just take something to take it off, and the whole country will erupt. Perhaps you'd might be able to make some comment about that.

ISAAC MORIN. Thank you. In West Papua we have two beliefs, two faiths. Number 1, Jesus will come, and No 2, freedom will come. And West Papuans didn't know exactly which one is coming first. If freedom is coming first, they enjoy it, why wait for God is coming or Jesus is coming. Or Jesus coming they enjoy it too—freedom and the beauty of the eternal. So those are the two things that now West Papuans have.

For West Papua we can reflect on Donald Trump and on Brexit. BREXIT exactly or Donald Trump phenomena is what is happening in West Papua. Until now there is no survey, either from the government or from an NGO. I don't know why. They are afraid to have the result, or

no funding for doing the research, we don't know. But if they do a survey they will see that what happened with Donald Trump in USA will happen, and what happened in BREXIT will happen. So that is what is happening on the ground. They are only waiting for the time. So I think the Indonesian government should do a kind of survey or research so that it has an idea about how to approach West Papua in this case. Because if no survey, I think there is a problem with this.

We see the phenomena in Jakarta. The governor of Jakarta is Catholic and Chinese, and he's rejected by most Muslims in Jakarta, because in the Al Koran (Al Qaeda 51) it says that Muslims do not vote for Christians. So, if we are still under Indonesia, this will happen in West Papua. What happens now in West Papua is that one candidate is West Papuan Christian, and the other candidate is migrant Muslim, because the population in the cities is in two groups. So if there is one Christian candidate and the other one is a Muslim candidate, the Muslim will get the vote of all the migrants plus the Muslims, and the Christian will get all the Christian votes but no Muslims. So, for example, if both in a pair of candidates are West Papuan, and another pair is one Papuan and one migrant, that one will be the winner. This was happening all over West Papua during the election. So it's a hard problem to solve, and we don't have a way, but there is always a way.

Q: How important is the support of the Pacific nations for West Papua?

JACOB RUMBIAK Thank you for the question. I also congratulate the debate groups. The support of the Pacific countries, especially the Melanesian Spearhead Group, is very important firstly because West Papuans are Melanesian, we are not Asian. Recognition of West Papuans as Melanesians puts West Papua on the right track to explain to Indonesia and to the international community that we have a right to independence. The preamble of the Indonesian Constitution says that independence is the right of all nations around the world. So the recognition of West Papua by Melanesians is very important.

Secondly, we go to the Pacific because we want to go the right and noble way. West Papuans cannot negotiate with Jakarta. It is very difficult, so we need a third party supported by the Pacific Coalition, especially the Melanesians. That can help West Papua and Indonesia. Our case must be taken back to the United Nations, which is the legitimate international body for solving national problems. Our case is a world problem, because Indonesia's occupation was facilitated by the international community. So we need a third party. That's why we go to the Melanesian Spearhead Group. We didn't want to create another problem between Indonesia and the Pacific. We wanted a third party to bring West Papua case to the United Nations. To sit and talk about our future.

The future of West Papua can benefit Indonesia. We are not against Indonesia. The future of West Papua can also benefit the Pacific nations and the world. So that's our target in going to the Pacific, and of course it can continue to Africa Caribbean Pacific group and the United Nations.