



Indigenous Papuans initiate own lockdowns in face of COVID-19
6 April 2020, news.mongabay.com

“By 6 April there were twenty-eight COVID-19 cases, and three deaths in West Papua. Local authorities have shut down air and sea traffic, and indigenous peoples are locking down their villages. There are fears of an outbreak among the 300 tribes, many with small populations that would be vulnerable to extinction.

Jokowi’s government has criticized the shutdowns, citing economic impacts and insisting only it has the power to impose such a measure. **Ricky Ham Pagawak, Bupati of Central Mamberamo district, said “Whatever happens in Papua, Papuans are responsible. This is our people, our land, our country.”**

The province-level governments in West Papua, along with the churches, have recommended the Indonesian Government enter into talks with the United Liberation Movement for West Papua”.



JACOB RUMBIK, ULMWP SPOKESPERSON, FRWP MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS

West Papua is now facing two enemies: the colonial policies of the Indonesian state, and its hapless response to the COVID19

corona virus. One measure of its long-term policies is the decrease in our population. In 1962, at the end of the Dutch colonial period, West Papuans were 99% of the population. In 2010, we were 30%. In 2030, according to Indonesia, we will be 15%. So after sixty years of Indonesian rule, not only are we at the bottom of the Indonesian human development index, we are also facing extinction.

In terms of Covid-19, the Jakarta government was severely criticised, and then ignored by Papuan Governor Enembe when he closed his province to ships and aeroplanes. *Documented* Covid cases have been Indonesians, not Papuans, but there’s been little testing, and no public education or COVID advice.

What the Indonesian government is doing behind COVID-19 in West Papua is also indefensible. As directed by Defence Minister—and notorious military-general Prabowo Subianto, troop numbers have escalated. In urban areas soldiers are going from house to house developing maps where the Papuans are located (as distinct from Indonesians living in West Papua).

In cities like Timika and Wamena there are tanks on the street. In the highlands there are military operations around Nduga, Lani Jaya, Tembagapura around the Freeport mine and Oksibil in the Star mountains. Recently a New Zealand worker at Freeport was shot. West Papuans were blamed. No one questioned how they penetrated Freeport’s extensive and expensive security measures. It would be wonderful if the West Papua Army could deliver such an effective long-range sniper shot. But I know that it can’t.

We want the United Nations and regional governments to stop Indonesia from using the COVID situation to mask its killing operations. **It is West Papuans, not the Indonesian government, who hold an inalienable right to defend our homes, our people, our sovereignty, our dignity, and our liberty.**

We call on UN member-states to vote for the motion Vanuatu is raising in this year’s General Assembly to register West Papua on the Decolonisation List. Vanuatu will be presenting the motion as Chair of the Melanesian Spearhead Group, and as Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF). Last year PIF and the African Caribbean Pacific Group passed preparatory motions that **call on all parties to address the ‘root cause’ of the conflict** and on Indonesia to allow the UN Human Rights Commission’s fact-finding mission to West Papua in 2020.