

**PABLO PASKOS, Debate-speech, Yarra Room, Melbourne Town Hall, 30 October 2022
(video-recording 0:21:12—0:28:18)**

Sarah Muyunga: Our next speaker, Pablo Paskos, is claiming that Australia is NOT doing enough to help West Papua. Pablo has a great interest in politics, international relations, and what Australia can do to help the people of West Papua. He believes that the youth of today has a pivotal role in shaping the Australia of tomorrow. Thank you Pablo.

POINT 1 – INTRODUCTION/SHORT HISTORY LESSON

Thank-you Sarah for your introduction. Thank-you also to everyone for coming along today, particularly members of the West Papuan community, for whom today's topic is very real.

500,000 men women, children, and infants . . .

Murdered.

60,000 innocent people . . .

Displaced . . . Torn from their homes.

663,000 hectares of West Papuan land . . .

Stolen from its rightful owners

1,200 protesters . . .

Arrested and disappeared, many never seen again.

. . . and those 1200 protesters are in the last year alone.

For the last 60 years, the people of West Papua have been under the rule of a tyrannical Indonesian regime that has:

- invaded West Papuan land,
- murdered West Papuan people,
- raped West Papuan women,
- destroyed West Papuan resources to make way for palm oil plantations, and
- committed countless other heinous and hideous crimes.

Statistics such as these may sound like something from a 'history lesson' but they certainly are not.

This is what *has* happened – and what continues to happen - in West Papua as I speak to you right now.

A country has been taken from its people. Crimes continue to be committed. Given all of this, you would think and hope that Indonesia's biggest neighbour - Australia - would be trying to stop this from happening, but they are not.

POINT 2 – APPEASEMENT – WORLD WAR II

In 1948, Winston Churchill remarked that: *"Those who fail to learn from history are condemned to repeat it."* Churchill was reflecting on the lessons to be learned from World War II.

As we all now know, one of the reasons that led to the war was the decision by supposedly 'wise old heads' to *appease* Germany, even as Germany was invading countries such as Austria and Czechoslovakia.

As a consequence of this approach of appeasement:

- millions died,
- lives were torn apart, and
- entire cities were destroyed.

All because the countries of the world turned a blind eye to the tyranny of Nazi Germany.

Let me clear. The atrocities committed by Nazi Germany are without parallel in human history and I am not saying the crimes being committed by Indonesia in West Papua are of the same magnitude. They are not.

What I *am* saying is that a common factor that has led to so much suffering is appeasement.

POINT 3 – APPEASEMENT – EAST TIMOR

Now let's move forward in time and closer to home, to the year 2002, when the country of East Timor gained its independence from Indonesia.

Like West Papua, the people of East Timor had been subjugated by Indonesia.

Like West Papua, protests for independence were ruthlessly suppressed by Indonesia.

And, like West Papua, the world, including Australia, chose to *appease* an aggressor.

Everyone knew that the East Timorese deserved independence.

Everyone knew it was the right thing to do.

But due to a focus on politics, economics, finance and self-interest, the nations of the world, led – or should I say *mised* – by 'wise old heads' – continued to appease Indonesia.

How many times must we continue to forget the lessons of history, and innocent people suffer as a result?

POINT #4 – INDIGENOUS VOICE TO PARLIAMENT

As many of you will know, the Australian government, elected in May this year, has committed to introducing an Indigenous Voice to Federal parliament as part of the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

In fact, this commitment was the first thing new Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said in his election victory speech.

As an Australian, this makes me proud.

But it also leaves me confused and saddened.

Proud because Australia is rightfully showing long overdue respect to First Nations Australians by seeking to introduce an Indigenous Voice to Parliament.

Such a voice will do much to ensure that First Nations Australians are listened to and heard, as they should be.

But I am also sad to see that while Australia is finally beginning to learn from its past mistakes in relations to First Nations people, we are not doing the same for the people of West Papua.

Instead, we continue to help *suppress* the voices of West Papuans by continuing to choose to *appease* Indonesia.

POINT #5 – YOUNG PERSON’S PERSPECTIVE + CONCLUSION

Finally, I am not standing here today, talking to you as an expert on West Papua.

I am not an experienced professor who knows everything about the West Papuan people.

I am not a ‘wise old head’.

However, as a young Australian here is something I do know:

My generation will inherit this country, but we do not want to inherit an Australia that is stained due to ignoring the completely unjustified and indefensible human rights abuses happening on a daily basis - happening right now while we sit here in comfort - right above our borders.

I can only begin to imagine how young West Papuans must feel; how they must wonder if they will ever experience a future free of oppression and dispossession.

I am sorry and ashamed of how little our country is doing.

As a regional power, and as a signatory to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, it is Australia’s responsibility to stand up for the people of West Papua.

Once again, this December massive protests will erupt in West Papua.

And, as we spend time with our families, have a barbecue, or laze on the beach this December, the people of West Papua will:

- continue to be killed,
- continue to be kidnapped,
- continue to be raped, and
- continue to have their homes and livelihoods destroyed under the hands of a brutal and malevolent Indonesian government.

So, is Australia doing enough to help West Papua?

Well, given that thousands of innocent West Papuans continue to be killed, kidnapped, raped, and have their homes and livelihoods destroyed, it is obvious that the answer is a resounding and damning “NO”!
