

Book launch: **Jacob & the Cassowary**, by Gipson Suu (2026)

Bard's Apothecary, 22 April 2026

I am proud to launch *Jacob and the Cassowary* today. It may have the appearance of a children's book, a fable, a parable, indeed a morality tale. It's an epic adventure, a journey from homeland – to the joy of independence.

Featuring two powerful native animals: the cassowary and the crocodile – you don't want to mess with these creatures. And 2 great rivers: the Puldama in the highlands, and the mighty Mamberamo. And a cast of real-world people – some of them in this room – West Papuans in exile, spread around the world, and dreaming of freedom, of reunion and homecoming.

The book has a clear vision from the outset: a free West Papua. And our hero, Jacob, is intent on attending the independence celebration. We see him set out from the author's home village of Nalca in the highlands, riding on the back of a very obliging cassowary. Their destination is Jayapura, the capital on the north coast.

I put Nalca & Jayapura into Google maps to see how far this journey is. And google found Nalca, and it found Jayapura, and even though I selected a pedestrian route, Google literally said: "Can't seem to find a way there."

But Jacob and the Cassowary find a way, aided by resourceful and hospitable highland women.

Without wanting to give away all of their adventures, to me the highpoint comes when they encounter the Indonesia president Prabowo Subianto.

"Do you want me to eat him?" says the crocodile.

Jacob thought long and hard. . .

We are challenged, as readers. Knowing what we know about the modern history of West Papua. About the crimes of Indonesian occupiers. About the trials Jacob has faced to arrive at this moral conundrum. What should he say to the crocodile? What would you say?

I myself am a pacifist, and committed to human rights and the imperfect systems we have fought to create as a global community in the shadow of the Second World War to right wrongs and achieve ideals of fairness, dignity and justice. I've been arrested, charged, tried and convicted for non-violent resistance to war. But it's easy for me. I've not suffered for my convictions.

I am reminded of Rev. Dick Wootton, who died just last year, aged 91. I bet some of you knew Dick Wootton. Give me a whoop if you did? Dick was a Presbyterian and Uniting Church minister & a great champion of social justice and human rights; a great opponent of racism and poverty; deeply engaged with freedom struggles around the world. He influenced and inspired many people of my generation.

Dick would not pass judgement on freedom struggles that, in desperation, turn to violence. Until your children are gunned down in cold blood, judge not what you might do in that position.

But Gipson's story is a beacon of international law, of the ideal of a just world.

In his story, Jacob lives up to his vision of a better world. He says to the crocodile, "No. Take him to the International Criminal Court in the Hague."

This is not a soft option. This is justice. And moral courage. It's a long and arduous journey to the Hague.

And more than that, Gipson's narrative sees an end to impunity: not just Prabowo, but *all* the other Indonesian presidents who have colonised, oppressed, robbed and terrorised West Papua since 1963 – the crocodile takes them all to the Hague!

What a message of moral clarity in these times: when Trump and his cronies are declaring international law a fiction, our own Prime Minister is unable to condemn an illegal invasion and former Prime Ministers are excusing war crimes.

International law only works when we see its value and defend it: a mutually agreed moral order safeguarding sovereignty, peace, human rights, self-determination and the bounds of warfare.

Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan defined the rule of law as something I think is worth defending, from the most trivial of by-laws right up to international law applied at the Hague. Both as a goal and a means to our most cherished ends. To quote his definition of the rule of law, it's:

“a principle of governance in which all persons, institutions and entities, public and private, including the State itself, are accountable to laws that are publicly promulgated, equally enforced and independently adjudicated, and which are consistent with international human rights.”

Gipson: thank you for sharing these glimpses into your beloved homeland with us. May you one day follow the cassowary home to your family. Thank you for sharing

your vision of a free and independent West Papua, one shared by so many, and for inspiring us both with a joyful destination and a principled path to reach it.

Congratulations on your book, and thank you all for joining us to celebrate it tonight.

– Cr Dr Olivia Ball