



Promoting human rights, peace and democracy in Indonesia

Honorary President:
Founder:

Lord Avebury
Carmel Budiardjo

Durham Road Resource Centre, 86 Durham Road, London N7 7DT, UK
T/F: 020 7561 7485; E: info@tapol.org W: www.tapol.org

Contact: Esther Cann, Coordinator, TAPOL, +44 7503 400308 esther.cann@tapol.org

News release

Are Jokowi's Papua moves merely savvy media stunts?

Dozens remain imprisoned and media access to Papua remains restricted

London, 14 May 2015 – In his visit to Papua last weekend, Indonesia's President Joko Widodo granted clemency to five Papuan political prisoners and announced that foreign journalists were no longer restricted from entering Papua. While these are steps in the right direction, they must be followed with concrete policies to end the criminalisation of free speech, said UK-based human rights group TAPOL.

"While we welcome these moves, they are totally meaningless if free speech is still brutally repressed in Papua. Jokowi's first steps should be to release all political prisoners in Papua and to guarantee unrestricted access for foreign journalists and human rights observers. Policies must then be put in place to ensure the protection of freedom of expression," said Esther Cann, TAPOL's Coordinator.

While mainstream press were quick to call Jokowi's moves 'bold' and 'historic,' they raise more questions than answers regarding political prisoners and access to Papua. Access for human rights observers and humanitarian agencies remains uncertain and new cases of arbitrary arrests and torture continue to be reported.

"Indonesia is sending mixed messages to Papua. One week hundreds are beaten and arrested, the next week a handful of prisoners are released and we are told the journalist ban will be lifted. If Jokowi is serious about lasting peace and protecting human rights in Papua, he needs to be sending a clear and consistent message."

On 1 May, just ten days before Jokowi's visit to Papua, 264 people were arrested in Manokwari, Merauke, Jayapura and Kaimana for commemorating the 52nd anniversary of Indonesia's annexation of Papua. Such a coordinated repressive response by security forces is at odds with the President's recent announcements.

According to Papuans Behind Bars, an online resource on Papuan political prisoners, despite the release of five political prisoners, at least 28 others remain incarcerated in Papua. Meanwhile, dozens of ex-political prisoners and other activists are at risk of intimidation or re-arrest. The five men who were released each spent 12 years in prison for their alleged role in a weapons arsenal raid in Wamena in the Papuan highlands in 2003. [Apotnalogolik Lokobal](#), [Numbungga Telenggen](#), [Kimanus Wenda](#), [Linus Hiluka](#), and [Jefrai Murib](#) experienced torture and ill-treatment in detention, and as a result have suffered serious and long-term damage to their health.

While TAPOL welcomes the release of the five men, it reminds Jokowi that he cannot ignore the remaining 28 Papuan and 29 Moluccan political prisoners still behind bars. Those who have been

sentenced should be given an immediate presidential amnesty, while those still facing legal process should have their charges abolished.

In 2010, Meki Elosak and Wiki Meaga were arrested alongside seven others and charged with treason for carrying a Morning Star flag – a symbol of Papuan identity – while on their way to a relatives' funeral. The two men, who worked as farmers, were not chosen for release last weekend even though they had applied for clemency last June. "The remaining political prisoners have spent years behind bars unlawfully under politically motivated charges. Why should they have to confess guilt to be granted clemency? Jokowi needs to prove that the releases were not just part of a media stunt" said Cann.

The releases received wide coverage by international journalists from the BBC, Al-Jazeera, New York Times and the Straits Times. On Sunday, Jokowi gave journalists more breaking news by announcing that international journalists were now free to enter and report on Papua.

For more than 50 years, access for foreign journalists seeking to report on Papua has been severely restricted. Those who have entered Papua on tourist visas have been deported, arrested and even imprisoned. Just last year, two French journalists were sentenced to 11 weeks in detention under immigration charges. International journalists and non-governmental organisations seeking to visit Papua are currently required to undergo a stringent visa application process involving the unanimous approval of 18 separate government agencies known as the 'Clearing House committee' under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Kementerian Luar Negeri*, Kemlu).

While Jokowi announced on Sunday that foreign journalists no longer have to apply for visas with Kemlu, others in his administration have been quick to issue contradictory statements. Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal and Security Affairs Tedjo Edhy Purdijatno [told](#) the Jakarta Globe that foreign journalists will still be screened before being issued permits for Papua. National Police spokesman Sr. Comr. Agus Rianto echoed him, [stating](#) in the Jakarta Post that "there are things we [Indonesia] can reveal to them and there are some that we can't."

These statements suggest that Indonesia will continue to restrict reporting in Papua. "What exactly has changed since Jokowi's announcement? It is unclear whether the Clearing House process will simply be called something different while the rules remain the same," said Cann.

Furthermore, the proposed [involvement](#) of the Indonesian army (*Tentara Nasional Indonesia*, TNI) in drafting new rules for international journalists is a serious cause for concern given their record of human rights abuses in West Papua. Since Indonesia's annexation of Papua in 1963, the media blackout on Papua has made it virtually impossible to hold security forces to account for human rights violations. With the military's vested interests in Papua, it is difficult to see how these new regulations will allow for unrestricted independent reporting.

Jokowi's announcement on lifting restrictions for journalists also leaves the question of access for humanitarian agencies and human rights observers unanswered. In 2013, Indonesia unilaterally cancelled and indefinitely postponed a visit by Mr Frank La Rue, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression at the time, allegedly because of his wish to visit Papua and Maluku. Indonesia's first litmus test on access to Papua should include a no-holds-barred invitation to Papua to Mr David Kaye, the current mandate holder.

Papuan civil society groups continue to report new cases of torture. In December last year, two men were tortured by police Mobile Brigades (*Brigade Mobil*, Brimob) officers in the conflict-affected Pirime district in Lanny Jaya regency. Their injuries were so severe that they spent months in hospital and their trials have only just begun.

“It’s difficult to see how journalists will be able to report on such cases of torture if there are areas ‘forbidden’ to journalists. Often the worst violations take place in remote conflict areas labelled as ‘unsafe’ for journalists,” said Cann.

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