

The Prospects for Papuan-Indonesian Dialogue

Papua Road Map: Negotiating the Past, Improving the Present and Securing the Future, Editor: Muridan S Widjojo, Jakarta 2009. Published by LIPI, Yayasan TIFA and Yayasan Obor. [In Indonesian]

The Indonesian state has confronted a number of regional rebellions across its vast archipelago during the more than sixty years of its existence. In the days of Sukarno, there was a rebellion in Aceh led by Daud Beureuh, a rebellion in Central Sumatra by a movement known as the PRRI, and one in eastern Indonesia by a movement called Permesta.

During the thirty-three years of Suharto's New Order, from 1965 to 1998, the military kept a tight grip across the country with the help of its Dwi-Fungsi (dual-function) powers, giving it unchallenged control of internal security as well as external defence. In those days, the regime created a new acronym, GPK, Gerombolan Pengacau Keamanan, Security Disruption Gangs, to brand people or organisations which were regarded as a threat to political stability.

It was not till B.J. Habibie took over as the country's third president when Suharto was forced to resign in May 1998 that the central government turned its attention to three major challenges to the country's highly centralised state structure. These emanated from Aceh, Indonesia's most north-westerly province on the western tip of Sumatra, occupied East Timor, a half-island located south of the country's eastern provinces, and West Papua, the country's far eastern province.

In 1999, Habibie took the unprecedented decision to offer the people of East Timor, now known as Timor-Leste, a 'popular consultation' to vote for or against autonomy. Even though the Indonesian military was in control of security and perpetrated atrocities against people suspected of being pro-independence, the Timorese turned out in huge numbers, rejecting autonomy by more than 78 percent, leading to the country's independence. Habibie could hardly have done otherwise; the scale of East Timor's sufferings since its occupation in December 1975 had become a world-wide scandal, dogging his predecessor's foreign trips. Timorese who were studying in Indonesia used every opportunity to highlight their people's plight whenever foreign dignitaries visited Indonesia by staging embassy occupations in Jakarta which always attracted the attention of the international media. Timor-Leste was to become the world's first independent state and UN member of the millennium in 2002.

Aceh came next. As part of a move by Jakarta to reduce the powers of the central administration in the wake of Suharto's downfall, a law to devolve certain powers to district administrations throughout the country was enacted. In recognition of the many problems that had dogged Aceh's relations with Jakarta, a special autonomy law for Aceh was adopted in 2001, Law 18/2001. In the same year, West Papua was also granted special autonomy under Law 21/2001. In both cases, these special autonomy laws met with widespread dissatisfaction. According to the Papua Road Map, both laws lacked legitimacy in the eyes of their people because they had been drafted without the involvement of local political and social organisations and parties. It was not until Jakarta entered into talks in Helsinki with GAM (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka, the Aceh Independence Movement), facilitated by the former president of Finland, that an agreement was reached between the two sides, resulting in a law on the Governance of Aceh. Shortly prior to the agreement, Aceh was devastated by a tsunami in December 2004 that left some 140,000 people dead, which

increased the pressure on all sides to end the conflict.

The 2001 special autonomy law for West Papua was enacted in a move to assuage Papua's desire for independence. It was regarded with deep suspicion by Indonesian nationalists and the armed forces. Having already been stung by the 'loss' of East Timor, they regarded special autonomy (OTSUS) as an unwarranted gift to Papuan separatists. But neither were West Papuan nationalists satisfied with OTSUS, in particular for failing to confront their demand for Merdeka (independence).

A Thick Wall

Papua Road Map is the product of several years of research undertaken in West Papua by academics at LIPI, the Indonesian Institute of Sciences. They point out that the key issue dividing Papuans and Indonesian nationalists is their sharply contrasting views on the history of Papua's integration into the Republic and its political status. This is described as being a 'thick wall' separating them. Whereas Papuans regard the so-called Act of Free Choice in 1969 as fraudulent, for Indonesians, West Papua became an integral part of the Republic of Indonesia proclaimed in 1945, having been previously a Dutch territory. This had been symbolised in the nationalist slogan advocated by President Sukarno: 'From Merauke to Sorong!' Moreover while Papuans stress their ethnic distinction as Melanesians, Indonesians argue that their republic is 'supra-ethnic', encompassing a huge number of different ethnic groups.

Aware of the growing influence of Papuan leaders after Suharto's downfall, Habibie recognised the need to hold talks. These took place on 26 February 1999 between a team of more than twenty ministers and a team of one hundred Papuans led by Tom Beanal. When Beanal declared that 'the Papuan people want to leave the Republic of Indonesia and have their own sovereignty', Habibie was caught unawares. According to Agus Alua, the Papuans also proposed the establishment of a transitional government under the UN and the holding of international talks. He said that the Papuans were encouraged in their stand by a letter the previous year from the Robert Kennedy Memorial Trust to President Habibie complaining about human rights violations in East Timor and West Papua. Instead of regarding the demands of the Papuans as the starting point for dialogue, Habibie, while neither accepting nor rejecting the Papuan demand, drew the talks to a close, saying that he would 'take these proposals into consideration'.

A Missed Opportunity

According to the Papua Road Map, this was a missed opportunity. Because of the failure of the Indonesian side to recognise the traditional Papuan approach to negotiations and its failure to consider the possibility of reaching a compromise, the breakdown in the talks resulted in the conflict continuing up to the present day, as well as a deepening mistrust between the two sides. Talks must be regarded as involving a long process. The Indonesian side needs to recognise that there are serious problems in Papua. Such 'rekognisi' was crucial for any chance of reconciliation between the two sides.

In May-June 2000, the Second Grand Congress of the Papuan People which set up the Presidium Dewan Papua, (Papuan Presidium Council) attended by tens of thousands of people coming from all parts of the territory, adopted a political programme which included among its demands

pelurusan sejarah (the re-appraisal of history) and Merdeka.

However, in 1999, Jakarta adopted a law that split West Papua into three provinces (pemekaran), without consulting the Papuan people or the Majelis Rakyat Papua Papuan People's Council, the body which was set up under the OTSUS law to represent the interests of the Papuan people. The 1999 law remained a dead letter until 2003 when a presidential instruction was issued for implementation of this law. By this time, Megawati Sukarnoputri, the most nationalistic of all presidents since her father in pre-New Order days, was president, and the least sympathetic to Papuan grievances. According to LIPI, the push for pemekaran came primarily from the National Defence Institute (Lemhanas) to advance their involvement in enhancing military businesses in the Papuan economy.

The creation of new districts has continued, encouraged also by Papuans aspiring to head these districts. By 2008, there were no fewer than 37 districts (kabupaten) and two municipalities, Jayapura and Sorong. Those pushing for the new administrations argued that it would facilitate greater access to local government for inhabitants in the interior but it is far from clear that this has been achieved. What is clear, according to the researchers, is that the new administrations have gobbled up most of the special funds allocated for development under special autonomy, to finance the construction of offices and pay the salaries of all the extra staff. It has also recruited many non-Papuans to fill office jobs for which Papuans are considered to be insufficiently trained.

What Development Has Meant for Papuan People

As a prelude to its evaluation of the prospects for dialogue, the Papua Road Map gives an account of the impact of development in West Papua. Far from benefitting the local people, this has resulted in their marginalisation and discrimination.

The education system is very unsatisfactory and has failed to produce Papuans with a decent level of education. Although plenty of schools have been built, there is a serious lack of teachers and school books. The LIPI team concluded that education is worse today than in the 1970s, largely because the private schools which were run by the churches have been closed down, giving way to Inpres (presidential instruction) schools of indifferent quality. They point out that teachers produced under the earlier system were more dedicated to their vocation than those produced today. Certainly, a great level of dedication is required for teachers to live in remote villages where they lack the facilities to which they are accustomed. (Most if not all the teachers are recruited from outside Papua.) The fees for local primary schools are far too high for many Papuans and the schools are too far away for the children to go to school every day, with little in the way of transportation. According to a survey undertaken in 2006, 73,729 of the 432,122 children aged 7-15 years, of whom 54,936 were concentrated in the Central Highlands, had never been to school. While the statistics would suggest that the number of teachers is adequate, they rarely teach at schools in the interior as most of them prefer to live in urban areas. Many head teachers simply don't bother to visit their school unless exams are taking place. A teacher at a secondary school in Merauke is quoted as saying that she couldn't teach children who had already graduated from primary school because they couldn't read, write or count. In Yahukimo district, where the number of primary school children was 15,662, there were only 331 teachers.

Moreover, the allocation of OTSUS funds for education was far below that required by law.

Education should received 30 percent of the budget but its allocation in the provincial budget for 2008 was less than five percent.

The state of /health/ in summed up as being quite appalling, largely because of widespread malnutrition, a lack of access to clean water and the lack of basic medical facilities. Throughout the vast territory, there are only twelve government hospitals, six private hospitals and 213 clinics. Almost 90 percent of Papuan villagers have no access to health clinics, most of which are only served by a nurse and a midwife. Availability of a doctor is regarded as a luxury and for many villages, the nearest hospital is 75 kms away. It is generally accepted that the health conditions of Papuans are very worrying indeed. For decades, Papuans have suffered from life-threatening diseases such as malaria, diarrhoea, acute respiratory infections (ISPA) and HIV/AIDS. In 2003, 14,392 people were suffering from HIV/AIDS, of whom 68 percent were indigenous Papuans. The number of HIV/AIDS sufferers in 2003 had trebled since 2000. Of the 1,454 afflicted people in 2003, 541 had AIDS, of whom 224 died, most of them between the ages of 20 49.

HIV was spreading not so much through sexual contact as from being passed on by pregnant women to their babies. (This suggests that the women were contaminated by their husbands after visiting prostitutes.) Little was being done by the government to halt the spread of the disease, while people's lack of understanding about the disease was the primary reason for its rapid spread. Sixty-eight percent of people living in West Papua have suffered from malaria, of whom 77 percent were indigenous Papuans.

Only 8 percent of the budget for the province as a whole is allocated to combating these serious diseases, while in the districts and sub-districts, it is as low as 2 percent. 'The government does not regard this health situation as being a threat to the existence of the Papuan people,' according to the LIPI researchers. The availability of medicines and other facilities was particularly bad in the kampungs. The number of doctors in a territory with a population of over two million was only 262.

According to LIPI, health facilities even in the urban centres have deteriorated since the introduction of OTSUS in 2001. Anyone needing hospitalisation must first pay a registration fee which has risen from Rp20,000 before OTSUS to Rp60,000. The level of treatment is much worse and patients are required to pay for their treatment up front.

As for economic empowerment, Papuans do not have the necessary business acumen to compete with people who have migrated to the territory from other parts of Indonesia and who will soon account for more than fifty percent of the population. Whereas in 1959, outsiders accounted for a mere 2 percent of the population, this rose to 35 percent in 2000 and an estimated 41 percent in 2005. Demographic experts expect it to increase to 53.5 percent in 2011.

The level of poverty in Papuan villages is extremely high. According to the National Bureau of Statistics in March 2006, 47.99 percent of the villages in the province of Papua were classified as being below the poverty line and 36.85 percent in Irian Jaya Barat which is now known as West Papua. This staggering level of poverty should be seen as occurring a territory that is extremely rich in natural resources and is host to a foreign multinational, Freeport-McMoran which is mining Papua's copper and gold and is the largest taxpayer in the country. BP has also just begun to exploit Papua's natural gas.

Papua-Jakarta Dialogue

Papuans have advocated the need for dialogue ever since the 2000 Congress, having opted to give up any form of armed struggle but the response from Jakarta has been unpromising and there have been no moves in this direction since the talks initiated in 1999 by Habibie were abandoned.

Right-wing Indonesian nationalists are dead set against dialogue, for fear of being confronted with demands for Merdeka. In Papua, many newcomers from Indonesia would also not support the idea of dialogue.

The reality of the situation as of now is that the two sides can each be said to be adopting 'non-negotiable' (harga mati) positions. For Indonesia, preserving NKRI, Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia, the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia, is regarded as non-negotiable, while many Papuans see their demand for Merdeka as non-negotiable. Being well aware that such a dialogue is going to be far from easy, Many Papuans say it is like merebus batu, trying to boil a stone. The Papuan position is reinforced by the continuation of military operations, resulting in yet more violence and suffering; violence against individuals, against ethnic groups, psychological violence as well violence in economic affairs.

Such experiences have only served to reinforce the Papuan sense of their own identity. While the perpetrators enjoy impunity, any actions taken by NGOs or the churches are condemned as being 'anti-NKRI' and 'pro-separatist' which these days can result in heavy sentences for maker (rebellion). Heavy sentences have even been passed against a number of Papuans for peacefully unfurling their symbolic kejora (morning state) flag.

Moves towards dialogue should take on board the need for international involvement although nationalists would condemn this as foreign interference.

Dialogue should, according to the Papua Road Map, be seen as an 'incremental process'. In the first stage, Papua should discard the use of violence/armed struggle and Indonesia should undertake to ensure the speedy implementation of OTSUS and demilitarisation. Dialogue under these circumstances would be seen as a move towards a post-conflict situation.

The solution to the conflict in Aceh is regarded as being a good example to follow. In Aceh, the first special autonomy law in 2001 had no effect because it was the result of talks between the political elite. The subsequent law, UU 11/2006, drafted with the involvement of key Acehnese stake-holders and facilitated by Finland, finally drew the line under the conflict.

The Papua Road Map points to a contradiction between Indonesian-ness and Papuan-ness. The latter took shape during the colonial period as the antithesis of Indonesian-ness. It takes pride in being Melanesian and having distinct physical features that differentiate them from Indonesians. For Indonesian nationalists, race and cultural differences are unimportant for a nation based on Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution.

Dialogue should proceed through four stages: a national dialogue between the central government and Papuan representatives, dialogue between the Papuan representatives, dialogue within the Papuan elite who will be in charge of the political processes, and then international dialogue

between the Indonesian government, Papuan representatives and an international mediator.

The Papuan conflict certainly has an international dimension because Papua's integration into Indonesia in 1963 involved The Netherlands, the US and the UN. Papuans also acknowledge the role of the UN in facilitating the 1999 referendum in Timor-Leste. This in turn inspired talks in Mindanao between the Moro Front and the Philippines government. Let it not be forgotten that it was Indonesia that facilitated and mediated these talks.

Indonesia's conflict with Aceh was mediated by Martti Ahtisaari, the former Finnish president. The Aceh case shows how helpful international mediation can be. This long history of international involvement in conflict solution has established a tradition that Papuans are entitled to regard as a good example to follow.

According to the Papua Road Map, the issues for the dialogue are as follows:

1. History and the Political Status of Papua
2. Reconciliation and Justice for Human Rights Violations.
3. The Failure of Development in Papua.
4. Marginalisation and Discrimination.

Dialogue can only proceed successfully if conducted in a conducive atmosphere. The experience of the Filipino case shows that talks should proceed side by side with the implementation of development projects in Papua, in particular measures to tackle the question of poverty in Papua.

While all sides will be crucial in achieving success in the dialogue, it is first and foremost the Indonesian government that must play the key role in ensuring that the talks are effective. OTSUS was welcomed enthusiastically in West Papua when it was first introduced but poor implementation has resulted in Papuans losing faith in the government's commitment to the law.

LIPi's Papua Road Map has made an important contribution to efforts to solve the Papuan problem through dialogue and it is now up to civil society in Indonesia to take this matter forward with all the commitment it deserves.

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