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Reflections on Papua

The Future Could Be Genocide

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Cause for Serious Concern

It was during a meeting with East Timorese church leaders in June 1999 that I last heard the word "genocide" mentioned. We had gathered in Soe, in the mountains of West Timor, to discuss developing events that eventually saw the East Timorese reject Indonesia's autonomy deal on 30th August 1999. While the world recently celebrated East Timor's independence, the price local people paid for their freedom was horrific. During that meeting in Soe my Timorese friends (both East And West) warned me about a likely "bloodbath" in East Timor. I thought they were exaggerating. What I now know about East Timor surely demonstrates my friend's warnings were accurate.

The word "genocide" was recently mentioned to me again. This time I was in Jayapura, Papua (Irian Jaya). It was 31st May 2002 and I was meeting with leaders of the Evangelical Christian Church in the Land of Papua. In the light of East Timor's experience and also in the light of the current situation in the Maluku Islands, I feel I can simply no longer take the word "genocide" for granted or fob it off as an exaggeration. Papua is now under great pressure and the people of Papua are looking in the face of a great tragedy. It could indeed be genocide.

Irian Jaya or more correctly, Papua, is a vast, little developed and somewhat isolated region occupying the western half of the island of New Guinea. Colonial interests (Dutch, German and English) carved up this island to form artificial boundaries that are considered entirely inappropriate by most people. Being Melanesian rather than Asian and Christian rather than Muslim, Papua now sits awkwardly within the Republic of Indonesia. The region is at a critical stage and I have visited the area many times over the past four years. These visits took place before the introduction of Special Autonomy for the province and also before the murder, in December 2001, of Theys Eluay, tribal leader and moderator of the Papuan Congress.

During those previous visits the evocative and somewhat controversial call for "merdeka" or "independence" was on lips of most Papuans. My visit last week witnessed a significant change where Papuans are "closing ranks" and are avoiding possible conflict through a commitment to the operation of a "zone of peace" in the region. They are focusing on maintaining a united stand to avoid certain provocation from outside forces. I believe its really a case of survival as Papuans work with tremendous pressures and seek a way forward. In another sense, it's a case of resisting insidious, subversive forces that

are being imposed upon the community by outsiders with the intention of undermining and destroying the Papuan community.

Papua already has a brutal history. International organizations estimate 30,000 indigenous people were killed during the turbulent 6 year period from 1963 to 1969. Moreover, observers believe 100,000 people have died in Papua over an extended 39 year period of occupation and systematic intimidation. Exploitation of vast natural resources, poor provision of medical services, famine and an overwhelming Indonesian military presence have all contributed to this tragedy.

Three issues are currently important. Firstly, there a massive shift in demographics as outsiders settle in Papua. Secondly, there is the possibility of a "Maluku"-style conflict with arrival of the Laskar Jihad in Papua and the formation of their organisation, "Forum Komunikasi Ahlus Sunnah Wal-Jammaah". Thirdly, there is serious collusion and co-operation between the Jihad, the militia and the military.

(1) Influx of Newcomers into Papua

Census figures for the year 2000 indicate a population in Papua of 1,460,846 indigenous people and 772,684 non-indigenous people. This demonstrates a population ratio of roughly two Papuans to one non-Papuan however this figure does not translate in terms of access to wealth, distribution of resources or participation in the local economy. The Papuan majority is clearly dispossessed at this juncture. Jakarta's Special Autonomy deal with Papua has provided opportunities for a share of Papua's wealth to remain in the region however the deal has opened the door to speculators and migrants from other parts of Indonesia who want a share in the deal. Special Autonomy pays little respect to Papuan identity and the overwhelming Melanesian ethos of the region.

I was informed that at least five ships (large inter-island ferries) are now arriving in Papua from other parts of Indonesia each week. Most arrive laden with passengers and then depart nearly empty. Initial calculations suggest around 5,000 outsiders (predominantly Muslims from Sulawesi, Maluku and Java) are arriving in Papua each week. These people are not part of an overtly organised transmigration program. Many come with the support of existing family members who are already established in the province and present trends suggest the number of incoming passengers will increase.

However there are more sinister issues here. Claims have been made that the military is, in fact, sponsoring the passage of thousands of young Javanese men to Papua by ship. These young men are given further support to set themselves up in one of Papua's urban centres. Dr Greg Poulgrain, in an article in the Courier Mail on 22nd May 2002, makes this claim and he suggests a contingent of Laskar Jihad are included among these migrants while the many Javanese new arrivals provide a ready-made source for militia recruitment in the event of conflict breaking out.

Population distribution throughout Papua is not even with at least three of Papua's major centers now demonstrating a Muslim majority (Sorong, Timika, Merauke). Informants

indicate the TNI (Indonesian army) are now proposing the possibility of establishing a number new military districts based on Sorong, Timika, Merauke and Jayapura. A long established practice in Indonesia where military and civilian government structures mirror each other would see the creation of a majority of districts/new provinces in Papua that are dominated by Muslim migrants. Papuans see this as a sinister strategy designed to isolate indigenous Christian majorities in the eastern section of Papua while most of Papua would then come under the control of newcomers. Many Papuans see this as another strategy aimed at the eventual Islamisation of Papua.

(2) Laskar Jihad arrive in Papua

A number of reports have already documented the arrival of the Laskar Jihad in Papua. Jihad activities are said to date from the year 2000 in the local districts of Aimas and Salawati (near Sorong) when a refugee teacher from Maluku was caught threatening another person with a weapon. This was followed up with a visit of the Jihad commander, Jafar Umar Thalib to Sorong in October 2001. Jihad training camps were set up for Muslim men in the area. Training includes attention to Islamic principles and self-defence. This initially took place late at night behind walled enclosures and then in isolated bush areas. Since the second week of April 2002 training programs are now taking place openly in the yard of Sorong's mosques, including the largest mosque, Mesjid Raya Al-Akbar. Activities take place late in the afternoon each day.

Jihad training is said to have been supported since November 2001 by the Laskar Jihad's former field commander in Ambon. ELSHAM (Institute for Human Rights Study and Advocacy) reports that a member of the TNI - Korem (Indonesian Army - Resort Military Command) and member of the local police are involved in secret activities related to the training of Jihad in Sorong. Training also appears to involve instruction on the stockpiling and use of arms, bombs and mortars. Home-made bombs and rockets have been stored in kampungs and homes. A number of these have been uncovered by local people (Christians).

ELSHAM also notes that a man who lives in the Al-Mujahidin Mosque in Kampong Baru in Sorong has been accommodating six Pakistani's in his house since 29th February 2002. Meanwhile a number of Afghani's have been recently been sighted arriving in Sorong by boat. These incidents evoke fears concerning overseas terrorist connections.

Local politics in Sorong (election of a new Bupati or district head) are being significantly influenced by the presence of the Jihad and there are fears that alliances are now being established between the Jihad and the local Bupati. Meanwhile a publication with the title "Laskar Jihad" is now being sold in the local market. Published outside Papua, the February edition of the magazine identifies Christians with the South Moluccan independence movement and it makes the claim that these people are responsible for the destruction of mosques. The magazine is said to vilify Christians (both in Indonesia and overseas), Jews and the United States of America.

ELSHAM claims the Sorong community is aware of the Laskar Jihad's presence. It is popularly perceived that the Jihad is there to oppose Papuan aspirations concerning independence and to force Papuans to become Muslims. Local government authorities appear to be powerless in opposing any Jihad activity while local police are either unable or unwilling to act. On the contrary, there is evidence indicating those who report Jihad activities to the authorities are being harassed and intimidated by unknown people

who call late at night. There has also been instances where people, who report Jihad activities to local police, have been threatened with arrest.

Sorong is rife with stories about the sighting of mysterious figures and the incidence of strange events. For example in January and February 2001 three churches in Sorong (GKO or Ecumenical Christian Church, GKAI or Bible Christian Church in Indonesia and GKI-Immanuel or Immanuel Evangelical Christian Church in the Land of Papua) all reported receiving strange envelopes in their offerings. Each envelope contained 1,000 Rupiah (about Aust.20 cents) and some script written in Arabic. In the current situation, such things raise all sorts of fears and suspicions.

It is not surprising to find many people believe there could be an outbreak of violence in Sorong similar to what happened in Ambon or Poso. One of my informants believes the Laskar Jihad are preparing an attack sometime between September and November 2002. They say Papuans and the Chinese will be targeted.

The fear is not confined to Sorong. In Fak Fak some 175 boats have been sighted arriving along the coast since April 2002 carrying Jihad personnel. These boats most probably come from either Maluku or Makassar (South Sulawesi) and informants claim a total of 300 boats are due to arrive in the area. Each boat is said to have a carrying capacity of around ten passengers plus cargo. Attempts to have local authorities inspect the boats and their cargo have been refused. These boats come in the guise of fishing vessels however efforts to have the Department of Fisheries inspect the boats have not been successful. There are now strong claims suggesting local government, police and the military are working in collusion with the Jihad.

Local Christian communities have detained a number of recent arrivals in the area. Four Jihad suspects who were carrying home-made pistols and firearms were caught and handed over to the authorities. No action was taken to prosecute these people for offences. The most recent incident took place on 28th May 2002 near Fak Fak. A man by the name of "Abu Taher" was caught carrying Jihad identification together with a map of Ambon (Kudamati area). Meanwhile Jihad training activities are said to be supported by up to 20 Afghans who are working quite freely without any reaction from local government authorities. ELSHAM reports that Osama Bin Laden's name is now on Fak Fak's streets. Since January 2002 street vendors have been selling T-shirts, VCD's and books related to Osama Bin Laden and his conflict with the United States.

Jihad communities have also been established in Jayapura in the Entrop-Hamadi area. During a visit on 30th May 2002 to Arso, a large transmigrant settlement some 2 hours

drive to the southeast of Jayapura near the border with Papua New Guinea, I listened to accounts concerning Jihad training camps that have been set up during the past six months among Arso's predominantly Muslim population. Cadres are being prepared in this transmigration complex to establish cell groups throughout the region.

Accounts from Arso suggest Jihad activities have been low profile with a focus on quietly infiltrating local communities. The local Camat in Arso (local district head) tried to initiate a religious forum to discuss the issue. This initiative was received by the minority Christian community however few Muslims chose to support this move and the local police and military failed to co-operate.

(3) Militia, the Army, Provocation and Social Unrest Collusion and co-operation between the Laskar Jihad, the pro-Jakarta militia (Satgas Merah Putih) and the army is rampant in Papua. The person who is said to have introduced the Jihad to Fak Fak, Ali Purnama, has dealt directly with the Satgas Merah Putih militia. Laskar Jihad and Satgas Merah Putih militia train together in secret locations in the jungle with a common commitment to oppose and defeat Papuan separatists. The so-called rationale here says independence for Papua will cause Indonesia to break up and it will require all Muslims in Papua to convert to Christianity.

Dr Greg Poulgain (University of Queensland) claims there is military involvement in the passage of thousands of young men from Java to Papua. These include Laskar Jihad and recruits for the ranks of the Satgas Merah Putih militia. Meanwhile there is clear evidence pointing to the direct recruitment of local people to the ranks of Satgas Merah Putih militia by the TNI (Indonesian army). A document recently obtained lists the names of 80 local people nominated to the ranks of Satgas Merah Putih in the Jayawijaya region (highlands). The document is approved and signed by the district military commander. It also lists a number of local tribal leaders who have been influenced and pressured to support the militia cause.

Laskar Jihad training in Fak Fak is also coordinated by Kopassus personnel (Special Forces Command troops) while there are similar liaisons between Kopassus, Jihad and Satgas Merah Putih militia in other parts of Papua. An informant suggested each group has its own function however they all part of the one and the same scenario. Linked here are the feared "ninjas", masked men in black who terrorise the population all over Indonesia. They are trained in the art of provocation, terror and murder. These "ninjas" were most likely involved in the massacre at Soya village in Ambon on 28th April 2002. They have recently re-emerged in Poso and one informant spoke to me briefly concerning the recent appearance of "ninja's" on the island of Biak.

There are presently 2,000 Kopassus operating in Papua while a special elite force of 100 highly trained personnel known as the "Pasukan Satuan Tugas Pemburu" ("Hunters Taskforce Unit") will be shortly arriving in the region from their headquarters in Medan. Papuans are naturally terrified at the thought of another military show of force. Special services and special elite forces are not trusted. I heard a number of stories concerning the increasing incidence of HIV Aids in Papua. While I could not obtain precise statistics, the

increase in HIV Aids is said to be alarming. Many people believe the military have a vested interest here introducing and perpetuating the problem.

The introduction of HIV Aids is being undertaken as an effective way of wiping out indigenous people. Alarming rates of HIV Aids among remote tribes in the Merauke region is a case in point. This has resulted from the introduction of prostitution in the area and the deliberate offering of favours to local tribal leaders in response to the acquisition of indigenous land for commercial development. Many believe this is a blatant case of ethnic cleansing.

Rev Herman Awom, Vice Moderator of the GKI di Tanah Papua (Evangelical Christian Church in the Land of Papua) and a president of the Papuan Council Presidium disputes the need for more troops in Papua. "There is no valid reason" he says, "to take such an action as Papua is relatively stable and peaceful. No major OPM (Papuan independence movement) strongholds at the moment exist in Papua which require such a counter force."

Church leaders are fearful that Papua is being led into a "Maluku-style" conflict where provocation from the military, the militia or the Jihad (or all three) will force the community in to a tragic spiral of violence and destruction.

Awom's concern is justified. Rumours that the grave of Theys Eluay (the murdered leader of the Papua Council Presidium) was vandalised were circulated on Friday 7th June. There are also rumours circulating that Benny Wenda, Chairperson of the "Dewan Musyawarah Koteka" ("The Koteka Tribal Assembly") was arrested and detained by the police on Saturday 8th June. These rumours appear to be designed to provoke the anger of local people and cause general panic. Many believe such rumours are being deliberately circulated by Indonesian agents with the intention of creating serious trouble.

One Papuan comments quite appropriately that "they killed Theys Eluay, but there was no war. They tried to arrest Papuan leaders, but still Papuans want non-violent movement. Then they started spreading rumours. And these are still ineffective. We want peace, security and stability in West Papua..we want Indonesia to stop its state terrorism."
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Is the Future one of Genocide?

My Papuan friends tell me there is a two million rupiah (\$Aus.450) reward for the execution of a pro-independence activist in Papua. The Jihad and the militia are being trained to clearly "kill Papuans" while a recent ELSHAM report cites a case in Sorong where a four year old boy is seen grasping part of a homemade bomb in the doorway of his house. The boy tragically exclaims, "kabel ini Bapak bikin untuk nanti mau bom orang Papua' (my father has made this cable because he wants to blow up some Papuans."

I also remember the words of a local police commander as he recently informed a church leader that "we are trained to kill....not to carry out the work of human rights!".

The people of Papua are extremely vulnerable. Every effort is being made to provoke some kind of conflict in Papua. The church is under serious attack for it is the most significant and most effective body in Papua in terms of gaining the trust of the local people and leading the community in the way of peace and non-violence.

Church and human rights workers are being constantly monitored by military intelligence. Death threats have been received and I have no doubt that the lives of key people in Papua, including senior church leaders, are under real threat.

The good news is that Papua is defying such provocation and intimidation. Close relationships exist between the churches good relationships have been created with local Muslim communities (who do not want to be part of Islamic extremism or Jihad activism). Papuans are seriously committed to declaring their homeland a "zone of peace" and many of the differences experienced among pro-independence groups are now being addressed.

The view from outside Papua says the region remains an unsophisticated, primitive, pagan place. Troublemakers claim Papua is a "hot bed" of Christian-sponsored separatism and this will lead to the disintegration of Indonesia. These claims are simplistic and far from the truth. There is much at stake here.

Any outbreak of violence or social upheaval in Papua will provide the military with the justification it seeks. For the military is waiting for its cue to move. The military is waiting for a "green light" to ruthlessly assert its dominance over the region and secure Papua's vast resources. Meanwhile any outbreak of sectarian conflict between Papuans and the growing Muslim community will provide the cue for intensified Jihad activity. The Laskar Jihad are waiting to move in with the intention of securing Papua. For it is claimed Islam is the only thing that can presently unite the whole of Indonesia.

In all of this, a band of militia men (both non-Papuan and Papuan) are being recruited, trained, armed and paid off to do the dirty work. There are shadows of East Timor here and Papua must be careful.

The Convention on Genocide was approved by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 9th December 1948. This convention provides a working definition of genocide:

"Genocide means any of the following acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, such as:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;

(e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group;"

I still remember that day in Soe, West Timor, when the word "genocide" was mentioned. Militia, in collusion with the Indonesian military murdered hundreds, if not thousands of East Timorese men, women and children. We were told it was going to happen and some of us tried to convince governments around the world that it would indeed take place. It has now also happened in Maluku where Christian and Muslim communities have been wiped out under the spurious notion that Christians and Muslims are supposed to hate each other.

Last week the word "genocide" was raised with me again. This time it was during a visit to Papua. My friend was not joking. "In 25 years time" he said, "we (Papuan) could all be finished". The world must take notice. The life and the future of Papua is a humanitarian issue and it's therefore a matter for all people. The life and the future of Papua is a justice issue and it's therefore a matter for all fair minded, law abiding people. The life and the future of Papua is an issue involving us as near neighbours. It's an issue involving us as we share a common bond with the Papuan people as brothers and sisters in Christ. It's therefore a matter for the Australian community and the Australian church. We simply cannot walk away from it.

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