

Press Release

Embargoed for May 13th 2004

Speaking tour May 13th-28th

US Involvement in the History of West Papua and the Human Rights Situation Today

May 13, 2004 – Today marks the launch of the West Papua Action Network (WPAN), a grass-roots advocacy group formed by U.S. citizens. The leading Papuan human-rights defender John Rumbiak, of the Institute for Human Rights Study and Advocacy (ELSHAM), will be speaking in ten cities across the Western U.S. during the WPAN inaugural events. Patsy Spier, an American schoolteacher who survived an ambush at the gold mine of Freeport McMoRan in 2002, will be joining Mr. Rumbiak for part of the speaking tour. WPAN has been founded to stop human rights abuses and genocide in West Papua, the Indonesian-occupied half of New Guinea. The aim of this network is to educate policy makers about the history of U.S. involvement in the region. This speaking tour is co-sponsored by the East Timor Action Network (ETAN).

John Rumbiak is briefly stopping in the U.S. on an international tour. “Forty years ago,” says Mr. Rumbiak, “Papuan became victims of Cold War politics. In 1962, the U.S. government helped broker the transfer of West Papua from the Netherlands to Indonesia. Denying Papuans the right to self-determination is the fundamental source of conflict in the region. About 100,000 Papuans have lost their lives at the hands of Indonesians. Economic and political interests have made the world community turn a blind eye to these on-going systemic abuses. Today Americans are standing up. They are asking their leaders to help bring an end to the violence in West Papua.” Recently Mr. Rumbiak visited Ireland where a majority of national parliamentarians have requested that the United Nations conduct a formal review of the 1969 “Act of Free Choice.” During this sham referendum 1,022 Papuans were hand picked by the military to unanimously proclaim their desire to be part of Indonesia.

Patsy Spier is one of the eight American, and three Indonesian, survivors of an ambush that took place in West Papua on August 31, 2002. Rick Spier, Patsy’s husband, was killed in the attack along with two other teachers. She says, “I knew I had to do something about the evil that happened on that mountain. My role became clear when the Indonesian National Police reported that the Indonesian military (TNI) were apparently behind the ambush, and then the TNI exonerated themselves of any involvement.” Patsy’s fight for justice is an inspiration to all Americans. Military aid to Indonesia under the IMET program has been blocked until the TNI fully cooperates with a U.S. investigation into the attack.

The WPAN is forming local chapters throughout the U.S. Harold Green, the WPAN Contact Person for Los Angeles and Director of the Pan-African Coalition for the Liberation of West Papua, says, “People of African descent are usually surprised to find out that the black people of West Papua have suffered in much the same way as we have, through slavery and colonialism. The world’s last vestige of direct colonial rule is in West Papua.” In June WPAN members will head to Washington D.C. to meet with their representatives in Congress.

For more information on the West Papua Action Network: wpan@redwire.us

To interview John Rumbiak or Patsy Spier call the WPAN Contact Person nearest you:

May 13-15: Seattle (206-543-9606)

May 21: Santa Barbara (805-965-5938)

May 17: Berkeley (510-540-0945)

May 23-24: Los Angeles (323-291-4114)

May 18: Palo Alto (650-326-8837)

May 25: Phoenix (480-965-0477)

May 19: Santa Cruz (831-227-4347)

May 26: Tucson (520-731-0572)

May 20: Watsonville (831-254-4527)

May 28: Telluride (970-728-4123)