

## WEST PAPUA: OUR SECRET SHAME

Pax Christi wishes to congratulate the West Papua Auckland Action on their recent conference : “West Papua: Our Secret Shame”. We have been involved ourselves in the struggle of the West Papuans for self-determination especially since meeting Franciscan activist, Br Budi Hernawan at a regional conference on Asia-Pacific peace issues. With his support and in cooperation with Caritas Aotearoa-New Zealand, we were able to bring several people from the Justice and Peace Commissions of West Papuan Dioceses to New Zealand for English language training. We were also able to utilise NZ development funding to support a women’s programme in Jayapura, the main city of West Papua. At one time and another, Kevin and Barbara McBride and Judith Crimmins visited West Papua to engage at first hand with our partners there and to evaluate the situation of the women’s Mama-mama movement.

At all times, and learning from Br Budi, Pax Christi has supported the ideal of finding ways for both West Papuans and Indonesian peace-minded people to cooperate in finding solutions to the current situation of conflict between the indigenous people and the government of Indonesia. We have worked closely with Fr Neles Tebay to encourage a peaceful dialogue across the separation lines and supported his election to the Executive Board of Pax Christi International. Likewise, we have been pleased to hear of the appointment of Leonard Imbiri, secretary-general of the Dewan Adat Papua (Customary Council of Papua) to a role as indigenous peoples’ representative on the World Council of Churches. Both of these men, as with all of our partners in this issue, are committed to finding peaceful solutions through dialogue and reconciliation, which is fully in accord with our own commitment to peace through these measures.

Changes in government policy have made it much more difficult to support the kinds of advocacy work we have engaged in formerly but there is still a lot we can do. New Zealand funding has supported exploitative industry such as forestry and mining in West Papua, industries usually based on the unauthorised use of indigenous land with no royalties returning to those people. In addition, such operations seriously endanger the environment and contribute to climate change. It is good to see that a community policing training scheme, well-funded by our government, being put on hold as all reports on it from Papuan leaders were negative.

We will continue to monitor such things such as these in close contact with our Papuan partners and bring pressure on the government to review their role when it is detrimental to the indigenous people. In addition, though, it is necessary to encourage our government to support a review of the instruments whereby Indonesia was given control over West Papua and to support petition of Vanuatu to bring the issue before the UN Special Committee on Decolonisation.

The indigenous people of West Papua are at a cross-roads as their land is being alienated in favour of multi-national exploitation and their people being overwhelmed by migrants from Indonesia to the extent that they are now a minority in their own land. We owe it to them, and to indigenous people everywhere, to work for a just resolution of all post-colonial issues. As Hone Harawira said, when welcoming West Papua Rex Rumakiak to Auckland: “I cannot be free until you are free.” His comment perfectly enunciates our feelings about West Papua and its people.