

West Papua's Cry for Freedom

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Region: [Asia](#), [Oceania](#)

Global Research, April 20, 2006

20 April 2006

The Australian Federal Treasurer, Senator Peter Costello told ABC Radio recently: "West Papua has always been part of Indonesia. Ever since Indonesia has existed as an independent country West Papua had always been part of Indonesia whereas, East Timor, of course was not". Of course, it is utterly untrue and misleading. The Australian Government thrives on deception and distortion of facts.

Clearly a little historical perspective is in order. West Papua which forms the western half of the island of Niugini (New Guinea or 'Nueva Guinea') was colonised by the Netherlands until 1962. The eastern half of the Island is known as Papua New Guinea, and was colonised by Australia. On September 16th 1975, Australia granted full independence to Papua New Guinea, although Canberra continues to interfere in the affairs of Papua New Guinea. Unlike Indonesia and Australia, the Island of New Guinea is inhabited by Melanesian people, with some 240 different tribes, each with its own language and culture. The tropical Island of New Guinea is the most biologically diverse habitat in the world, second only to the Amazon region.

While Indonesia gained its independence from the Netherlands in 1949, it was on 01 October 1962, the Dutch handed over the territory of West Papua to a United Nations Temporary Executive Authority (UNTEA). On 01 May 1963, with tacit support (heavy pressure on the UN) of the US Administration Indonesia took control of the territory from the UNTEA. Many argued that the takeover of West Papua was an invasion by the Indonesian military. The territory was renamed West Irian and then Irian Jaya. Under the 1962 New York Agreement, Indonesia was required to organize a referendum to seek the consent of West Papuans for Indonesian rule.

In 1969, while many prominent West Papuan leaders were in prison, the Indonesian military hand-picked just over one thousand West Papuans tribal leaders for the so-called "Act of Free Choice". Indoctrinated and under strong threat and intimidation by the Indonesian military, they voted in favour of Indonesian rule. The rigged 'referendum' resulted in a 100% vote which saw the replacement of one colonial power (the Netherlands) by another (Indonesia). As a result, West Papuans lost their independence and self-determination. To control West Papua, Indonesia relies on brutal repression, covert military operations and the division of West Papua into three provinces.

Like Papua New Guinea, West Papua is rich in mineral and energy resources. Its resources exploited by multinational corporations, including Union Oil, Amoco, Agip, Conoco, Phillips, Esso, Texaco, Mobil, Shell, Petromer Trend Exploration, Atlantic Richfield, Sun Oil and Freeport-McMoran (USA); Oppenheimer (South Africa); Total (France); Ingold (Canada); Marathon Oil, Kepala Burung (UK); Dominion Mining, Aneka Tambang, BHP, Cudgen RZ, and CRA (Australia). The extracted billions in gold are shared between these corporations, the

Indonesian military and Indonesia's elites at the expense of the people of West Papua who remain poor, and their unique environment.

Freeport's Mt Ertsberg mine is the second largest copper mine in the world. It also contains the largest proven gold deposit in existence. Since 1967, Freeport-McMoran extracted more than \$100 billions from West Papuan soil, value. The region around the mine is (military zone) closed off to outsiders, as well as to the traditional land owners who have been dispossessed. The mine is in the rugged central highlands of the Island at elevations of more than 13,500 feet above sea-level. Freeport is simply turning an entire mountain of gold and copper into an open pit.

In the US, Freeport was known to be the largest polluter of land, air and water, both in terms of volume and toxicity, in the whole of North America. In addition to extracting the wealth of West Papua, Freeport has done irreparable destruction to the surrounding environment, including the logging of unique rainforest and the poisoning of nearby rivers. Other mines like Bougainville and Ok Tedi in Papua New Guinea have had similar effects. Furthermore, Freeport is the cause of thousands of West Papuan deaths, and continues to pay the Indonesian military for gross human rights abuses, including the killing on 11 November 2001 of Theys Eluay, the Chairman of the Papuan Presidium Council and pro-independence leader.

Successive Australian Governments not only turned blind eye to more than 40 years of human rights abuses and destruction of the environment in West Papua, but they also encouraged them. After more than two decades of supporting Indonesia's brutal repression of East Timor, Australia benefited greatly from the independence of East Timor. Indeed, the Liberal Government of John Howard thrived and gained political mileage out of the "sadness and sorrow". After leading the UN mission into East Timor, later Australia used East Timor's weak position and government to carve up East Timor's sea rights and oil resources at the expense of starving East Timorese.

The granting of temporary visas to forty-two West Papuan refugees by the Australian Government was not out of compassion, but to foment trouble in West Papua, according to Indonesia's intelligence. Australia is well-known for its inhumane and often brutal treatment of refugees. Many refugees have been denied their human rights and are incarcerated in remote camps around Australia and on off shore Islands. Human rights groups and church leaders have accused Australia of breaching international obligations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a result of its off shore detention of refugees.

Based on East Timor case before and after independence from Indonesia, Australia's interference in the affairs of West Papua is purely self-interest and devoid of any moral principle. Despite mounting credible evidence, including refugees' testimonies of ongoing genocide and human rights abuses against the people of West Papua [1 & 2], the Australian Government failed in its obligation to protest to the Indonesian Government. Instead, the Australian Government encouraged Indonesia and continues to burry the truth about the situation in West Papua and beat the drums of US war in the Middle East.

Manipulated by fear and a constant diet of racism promoted by the Government, ordinary Australians blindly trusted John Howard and thought that they could succeed simply by following his deceptive policies and distortion of facts. Today, Australians are "meaner", more intolerant and less secure than before John Howard become Prime Minister. Poverty is

on the rise and racism against minorities has increased and is now accepted as part of Australia's Anglo-Saxon values. It is hard to think of any serious accomplishment of John Howard's ten years in office. In the end there is nothing there for most Australians. The "anti-terrorism" laws have undermined basic legal rights and civil liberties and discriminate specifically against Muslim Australians. And the new industrial laws are so draconian that they dwarf the recently abandoned French First Employment Contract laws or CPE. No one expects Australians to be like the French, and the Australian Government implemented its new laws with ease. Dissent is no longer exists in Australia, passivity is. A once democracy turned into a police state by the power of one man.

In the mean time, Australians have been entertained by the Government-appointed Cole Commission of inquiry. The Commission – with no power – supposed to investigate whether the Australian Wheat Board (AWB) had breached Australian laws by paying kickbacks (bribes) to the Iraqi government.

The bribes allegedly paid to secure grain sale contracts to Iraq during the 13-years long genocidal sanctions – in which Australia was a full complicit – that killed an estimated 1.6 million Iraqis, a third of them children under the age of 5 years old. Corrupting the system was the only way available to the Iraqi government of Saddam Hussein to break a deliberate mass genocide perpetuated by the Anglo-Saxon axis against the entire nation of Iraq. Instead of investigating the Howard Government corruption, the Commission is concentrating on Saddam Hussein. It is clear, the purpose of the farcical Commission is a smokescreen to bail the Howard Government and appease members of the US Congress and the UN.

The Australian Government's long record of collaboration with the Indonesian military and its support for many oppressive regimes around the world is against West Papuans' aspirations for self-determination and national independence. Through peaceful struggle and negotiation, West Papua's cry for freedom may not be too painful.

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Endnotes:

[1] Brundidge, E. *et al.* (2004). Indonesian [Human Rights Abuses](#) in West Papua: Application of the Law of Genocide to the History of Indonesian Control. New Haven, CT: Allard K. Lowenstein International Human Rights Clinic, Yale Law School.

[2] Wing, J., & King, P. (2005). [Genocide in West Papua](#): The role of the Indonesian state apparatus and a current needs assessment of the Papuan people. Sydney: West Papua Project at the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Sydney.

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