

Human rights is a space that often brings people together and then split them apart. The grounds for escalation result from a multitude of factors. From lack of measures taken by the government to prevent such atrocities, to lack of cooperation between the citizens and the existing laws.

West Papua is a region in Indonesia [fighting for independence](#), recognition of statehood and elimination of racism in the region. The ethnic Papuans have been discriminated against, and their values and ideals being compromised upon.

On the occasion of the release of the 6th ICP Report on Human Rights in West Papua, a press conference was organised by a Geneva-based NGO Geneva for Human Rights (GHR) at the Swiss Press Club, Geneva on 11th February 2020. The ICP is the International Coalition on Papua. Mr Adrien-Claude Zoller is the President of the Board of the ICP, and President of Geneva for Human Rights. More than 60 organisations in Indonesia and West Papua are part of the ICP. Independent Human Rights Defenders from West Papua were present, with the presence of the representative of the Permanent Mission of Indonesia, journalists and Members of the GHR.



West Papua on map

West Papua faces developmental issues. This is due to growth in the need for self-determination for Indigenous Papuans. It has also led to an aggravation of the armed conflict in West Papua, leading to many fundamental rights and freedoms being affected; which implies restrictions on their application. One of the core ideas of the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is to ensure respect, promotion and protection of human rights. This is unfortunately violated by many States, and often is the cause for conflict between people and the States. In human rights, impunity is a strongly discussed space, so are reprisals.

In West Papua, indigenous Papuans who are under threat due to [land-grab activities](#) by the government, and deforestation activities. Indigenous Peoples are known for their existence and livelihood which comes from the forest, more particularly Mother Nature. This is a violation of the natural rights that the Indigenous Peoples are born with. This has caused the birth of tension between Papuans and Non-Papuans. It has also infiltrated into the marginalisation of Indigenous Papuans. One has to understand that such activities impact

food security for these communities. It also impacts the environment due to the exploitation of resources.

Women are a vulnerable group in West Papua. They [face discrimination, violence](#) (domestic and State), stigmatisation and lack of opportunities to participate in political affairs. The Government of Indonesia has [reserved thirty percent](#) for the participation of women in politics, but data suggests that less than half of thirty percent of women are involved. Based on my interaction with many women human rights defenders from West Papua, gender never seemed to be an issue. The women were strong and believed in what they were advocating for. Some of them had to face threats against their family, have them detained in police stations and their children being chased by the army, but that did not stop them from continuing their advocacy against discrimination by the State.



Free West Papua rally in Vanuatu

Funds by the Central Government of Indonesia are allocated for the provincial governments

of Papua and Papua Barat, to improve standards of health, education and infrastructure. These funds have not brought adequate necessary changes for the Indigenous Papuans. Health is an important concern because in many remote areas of West Papua, problems such as malnutrition, lack of medicines and absence of health workers has reeled into another issue. Education standards have been lower in comparison to standards in the larger areas of West Papua. This affects developmental standards in terms of educational awareness causing an imbalance in growth. New schools have been built; more teachers have been employed. Yet, teachers are not adequately skilled and some remain absent. Emergency schools have been established by Indigenous Papuans to help children study in the Nduga Regency. The racist treatment has been meted out to Papuan students in Java from nationalist groups and security personnel. Student dormitories were demanded to be searched. Upon refusal, many students were called for appearances to provide justifications.

The UN High Commissioner has addressed the [human rights situation in West Papua](#), especially through the Press Releases. During the Human Rights Council of 2018 and 2019, the Government of Indonesia has been provided with many recommendations to help ease the escalation of human rights violations in West Papua. One of the Human Rights Defenders was at risk after he provided his statement during the Human Rights Council in February 2019.

The ICP provided Seven key recommendations, which were addressed to the Government of Indonesia. They are as follows:

1. End all killings and torture of Indigenous Papuans and hold all security forces' perpetrators of such acts accountable in civil and transparent courts.
2. Provide open access for all foreign journalists and other Civil Society observers to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and to all Special Procedures of the UN Human Rights Council.
3. Respect and protect the freedom to assemble, to associate and of expression of political opinions in a peaceful manner, and in particular, where these differ from the unitary state ideology.
4. Prioritise accessibility, adequacy, availability and quality of healthcare and education for marginalised indigenous populations living outside all urban areas.
5. Criminalise in an effective manner all violations of 'Free Prior Informed Consent' (FPIC) Principles, stop the deforestation of primary rainforest areas for industrial or agricultural development and protect the livelihoods of indigenous communities.
6. Stop transmigration as a root cause of conflict and marginalization of indigenous Papuans and publish an updated and ethnically disaggregated demographic area.

7. Engage in dialogue with the United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULMWP) to allow for a peaceful resolution of the political and historical conflict.



People in West Papua protesting against Indonesia's government/ Image: One PNG

Similar to West Papua, many indigenous communities face discrimination and a complete lack of respect for their rights. Similar to West Papua, many States face cases of enforced or involuntary disappearances. Similar to West Papua remains of the dead have been exhumed from their burial sites which is also a serious human rights violation. Families often don't report the missing person case due to fear of reprisals. Similar to West Papua, education, health, safety and infrastructure are important to ensure a humane standard of living for every person, irrespective of gender, race, nationality, ethnicity and sex. Similar to West Papua, fundamental freedoms of many have been restricted or not in complete enjoyment due to situations of conflict, armed conflicts, discrimination, violations and no respect for promotion and protection of human rights. Similar to West Papua, students face security issues both within their national domicile and abroad in many other States. Their fundamental rights are restricted, peaceful assembly is prevented, expression is questioned and outcomes are severe. Similar to West Papua, many States are experiencing internal conflict due to racism, acceptance of self-determination and civil conflict over economic, social, cultural and political rights.

Human rights are universal and natural. Though we have conventions for ratification and accession in order to exemplify human rights domestically, there's often an existent conflict between ratification and implementation. The Human Rights Council, the UPR (Universal Periodic Review), Special Procedures and Committees have been established to further promote, protect and respect human rights. They are based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The international community must realize the full potential of successfully implementing human rights treaties and the positive impact it can have with development for States and their citizens.

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