



Papuan Customary Leaders Arrested Following Prayers

Thursday 29th August, 2013

On August 28th 2000 people gathered at Marantha Church hall in Sorong, praying for the safe passage of the Freedom Flotilla to West Papua, a journey that hopes to reunite the indigenous cultures of Australia and West Papua, and bring human rights abuses to light. As the congregation concluded, 200 police surrounded the church, and arrested four of the event's leaders.

The customary leaders Apolos Sewa, Yohanes Goram, Amandus Mirino and Semuel Kasdjok are believed to remain in police custody in Sorong Police Station this evening.

The Freedom Flotilla participants in Cape York this evening collectively made the following statement, "We demand the immediate release of those arrested. We condemn the Indonesia government for suppressing the West Papuan People's right to peaceful protest. The international community have an obligation to respect and uphold the human rights of West Papuans."

Josef Benedict from Amnesty International also [expressed his concerns to West Papua Media](#) over the arrests at the peaceful action.

Izzy Brown, Freedom Flotilla co-founder responded to news of their arrests, "The Freedom Flotilla stands in solidarity with the four Papuan leaders arrested in Sorong on Wednesday. We feel their prayers of support on the wind that bring us towards West Papua, we hear their crying out for freedom as their democratic and cultural rights for expression continue to be repressed. This is exactly why we are taking the Freedom Flotilla to West Papua".

Ronny Kareni, a Freedom Flotilla organiser and West Papuan refugee stated, "It is shocking and yet not surprising, but completely unacceptable in this day and age, that the freedom of expression of peaceful demonstrators is censored in such an extreme way. We demand the immediate release of the four prisoners in Sorong. We need immediate international pressure to be placed on the Indonesian government to ensure that no harm comes to these customary leaders."

He continued, speaking from Papua New Guinea, "The arrests yesterday of the four Papuan leaders is a reflection of the reality that there is no space for democracy in Papua and West Papua Province under Indonesian occupation, and yet foreign governments are complicit in endorsing these ongoing abuses."

Ronny's statements come just days after the United States announced the sale of 80 Apache attack helicopters to Indonesia.

Uncle Kevin Buzzacott stated this afternoon, "The Australian government needs to step up and to put pressure on the Indonesian government to immediately release those four prisoners and not to harm them in any way. They need to be released because they have not committed any crime. We need to ask all Australian's to take a firm position of this issue, to be strong for Human Rights in West Papua. The Papuan's have had it rough for too long with Indonesia there and this cant keep going on. The prisoners must be released immediately".

The Freedom Flotilla is continuing its journey up the Far North Queensland Coast, reaching Portland Road this evening. The fleet is expected to make landfall in West Papua in late September.

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Izzy Brown "The Freedom Flotilla stands in solidarity with the 4 Papuan leaders arrested in Sorong on Wednesday. We feel their prayers of support on the wind that brings us towards West Papua, we hear their crying out for freedom as their democratic and cultural rights for expression are repressed. We are inspired by their commitment and strength to keep them through their 50 year long struggle. On hearing of their arrests we are reminded to renew our dedication on this journey, as we are now seeing exactly the kind of repression of cultural and political expression that we seek to end in West Papua."

Ronny Kareni "It is shocking and yet not surprising, but completely unacceptable in this day and age that the freedom of expression of peaceful demonstrators is censored in such an extreme way. We demand the immediate release of the 4 prisoners in Sarong, namely Apolos Sewa, Yohanes Goram, Amandus Mirino and Samuel Kasdjok.

This is the time Australia to stand up for people who are being militantly controlled and attacked for simply trying to have a voice."

Ronny Kareni " The arrests yesterday of the four Papuan leaders is a reflection of the reality that there is no space for democracy in Papua and West Papua Province under the Indonesian occupation, and yet foreign governments are complicit to this ongoing abuses. The Freedom Flotilla to West Papua is aiming to highlight this entrenched long term brutality that is demonstrated by these arrests.

Uncle Kevin Buzzacott "Indonesian government to immediately release those 4 prisoners and not to harm them in any way. They need to be released and not to be harmed because they have not committed a crime. We felt very sad when we seen it in the news today. We are waiting for the other mob to turn up here on Horne Island so we can work out how to respond a bit more but for now we need to ask all Australians to take a firm position on this issue, to be strong for Human Rights in West Papua. They are hurting them everyday, for years and regardless of the Freedom Flotilla this is happening, but we having a go, tryin' to get the World to see, to look and listen and take a stand for these people. The Papuans have had it rough for too long with Indonesia there and this cant keep going on. The prisoners must be released immediately".

Izzy "We are dismayed to hear that the peaceful act of praying has resulted in such extreme actions by the police and military in West Papua, highlighting once more the lack of basic human rights and freedoms that we in Australia take for granted every day. We need immediate international pressure to be placed on the Indonesian government to ensure that no harm comes to these good people who have simply undertaken to express themselves in a democratic way.: