



THE BOAT WILL RETURN, BUT THE SACRED WATER AND ASHES WILL CONTINUE

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The Pog, flagship of the Freedom Flotilla has returned to Australian waters, following threats made by the Indonesian military and a successful cultural exchange between indigenous elders from Australian and West Papua.

The Pog had sailed along the border region between Australia, PNG, Indonesia, making repeated attempts to open a dialogue with the Indonesian navy. The non-violent nature of the action was reiterated in communications via SMS, phone calls, emails, letters and in person at the Indonesian Embassy in Canberra. However the Indonesian Navy had not respected calls to dialogue with the Freedom Flotilla, not acknowledged that the peaceful protest vessel was unarmed, and not ruled out force being used to turn the boat back.

Indonesian authorities refused to respond or open a dialogue within 24 hours. The fleet was then joined by a new member, an unmanned dinghy which carried a satellite tracker into Indonesian waters, on Friday morning, as a safety measure while the small yacht sat unprotected on the border.

Izzy Brown explained from on board the Pog. "The Indonesian Government and Military refused not only our calls to dialogue, but also refuses to sit down for dialogue with West Papuans and find resolution for the issue of West Papua's right to self determination."

"We didn't want to sail into a violent confrontation with warships, our mission was to bring the sacred water and ashes as an offering of solidarity with the Indigenous people of West Papua, and to bring attention to their struggle, which against all odds we managed to achieve" she continued.

Media Spokesperson Ruben Blake said, "Its time the world pays attention to the violent repression carried out West Papua's peaceful Independence movement. Indonesia attempts to hide this story, by locking dissenters behind bars, by blocking journalists and human rights observers from entering West Papua. The Freedom Flotilla has publicly demonstrated this, and put the issue of the lack of space for democratic expression in West Papua back on the international agenda."

"We are not surprised by the way this peaceful action was received by Indonesia," said Flotilla organiser Ronny Kareni. "The threats against the Flotilla, as well as the charges of treason against four West Papuan organisers of a congregation praying for their safe passage, are just examples of the way ordinary West Papuans are treated when exercising their democratic rights."

"Against this 50 year long military occupation, West Papuans are finding creative ways to overcome, to rise against oppression. This Freedom Flotilla was just another wave of the struggle to free West Papua, and it is clear that the determination and the spirit of West Papuans remains strong" he continued.

Uncle Kevin Buzzacott, who initiated the idea of the Freedom Flotilla with Jacob Rumbiak in 2000, spoke of the journey's success. "The water went back to where it started from and won't return for 40,000 years. It will give power and strength to everyone. And the fire that will be lit all over West Papua and the other islands will warm people's hearts and give them knowledge and peace. The issue of West Papua will be too hot for Indonesia to cope with."

The arrival of the water and fire was already celebrated by hundreds yesterday in Manokwari.

Today in Merauke there will be a peaceful celebration of the successful cultural exchange between Indigenous Australians and West Papuans, and all those on the Freedom Flotilla who brought global awareness of the Indonesian occupation and the West Papuan's fight for freedom. The Freedom Flotilla be monitoring the outcome of that protest, given the military build up in the port city, and will be providing updates as they become available.

media@freedomflotillawestpapua.org Ruben Blake +61414091706