

# West Papuan Demographic Transition and the 2010 Indonesian Census: “Slow Motion Genocide” or not?

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## **Synopsis**

*This paper analyses the ethnic breakdown of the Indonesian provinces of Papua and Papua Barat, commonly referred to collectively as West Papua, following the recent partial release of the 2010 Indonesian census. It shows the growing domination of the population by non-Papuan migrants to the point where the indigenous Papuans are now in the minority. Using historical growth rates the ethnic breakdown of the provinces is then predicted for 2020, showing the increasing marginalisation of the Papuans. The political ramifications of this massive demographic transition are then discussed, including the implications for Indonesia, Australia and the United States. The paper finishes with a discussion on whether a form of genocide is underway, as many Papuans claim, and concludes more research is needed to answer this question, specifically calling for an international fact finding mission.*

### **A Note on the Author /Acknowledgements**

*Dr. Jim Elmslie is founding Co-convenor of the West Papua Project at the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, the University of Sydney. He has researched West Papuan politics since his first visit there in 1987. His Ph.D. at Sydney University entitled, 'Irian Jaya Under the Gun: Indonesian economic development versus West Papua Nationalism', was published by the University of Hawaii Press in 2002.*

## **An analysis of the population of West Papua**

The recently released 2010 Indonesian census preliminary report shows the population for the two provinces of Papua and Papua Barat as 3,612,854<sup>1</sup>. In this analysis I am treating the two provinces together using the term West Papua as they were previously one province and the historical data reflects this. The 2010 census does not break the population down to its two main segments: Papuans and non-Papuans (migrants from other parts of Indonesia and their offspring). However previous censuses have recorded ethnicity and it is possible to extrapolate from historical data to determine the current ethnic make up of West Papua and how quickly demographic change is occurring. As base line figures I will only use published Indonesia data, although some dispute the accuracy and objectivity of these figures.

Papuans were identifiable as a distinct population segment in the 1971<sup>2</sup> and the 2000 censuses<sup>3</sup>. In 1971 they were referred to as “Irian born”, while in the 2000 census a comprehensive breakdown of different tribal populations was undertaken. By examining how the two population groups have grown over this period we can determine two quite different growth rates: the Papuan rate driven exclusively by natural increase (births less deaths), and the non-Papuan rate, caused primarily by inward migration from other parts of Indonesia as well as natural increase.

The Papuan population increased from 887,000 in 1971 to 1,505,405 in 2000. This represents an average annual growth rate of 1.84%. The non-Papuan population increased from 36,000 in 1971 to 708,425 in 2000. This represents an average annual growth rate of 10.82%.

The 2010 census figures so far released only give a total population figure without breaking that figure down into respective ethnic groups, however we can determine the ethnic breakdown by using the historical growth rates of the Papuan population. Assuming the historical Papuan annual growth rate has been maintained over the course of the last decade the Papuan population in mid 2010 (at the time the census was conducted) would be 1,790,777. This equates to 49.55% of the total 2010 population of West Papua of 3,612,854. Accordingly the non-Papuan population would be 1,822,677, or 50.45%.

Alternatively we can estimate the non-Papuan population by using the 2000 census number, 708,425, and applying the historical growth rate of 10.82%. This would give a mid-2010 non-Papuan population of 1,882,517, or 52.10%. Accordingly the Papuan population would be 1,730,336 or 47.89%.

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<sup>1</sup> *Hasil Sensus Penduduk 2010*, Data Agregat per Provinsi. Badan Pusat Statistik, Jakarta, 2010

<sup>2</sup> *Irian Jaya: Economic Change, Migrants, and Indigenous Welfare*. Chris Manning and Micheal Rumbiak in Hal Hill, Ed., *Unity and Diversity, Regional Economic Development in Indonesia since 1970*. Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 1991, p.90.

<sup>3</sup> *Hasil Sensus Penduduk 2000*. Badan Pusat Statistik, 2000.

These two sets of calculations results in very similar outcome, indicating that historical growth rates for both populations have continued. In fact if we added the projected populations of each group – 1,790,777 Papuans and 1,882,517 non-Papuans – we come to a total of 3,673,294. This is only 60,440 more than the actual figure from the 2010 census of 3,612,854, being an error of only 1.67%. To allow for this error, given the ethnic split, I will deduct half the total over-estimation (60,440 divided by two equals 30,220) from each population group to determine the final ethnic numbers.

Adjusted population figures:

Papuan population	(1,790,777 – 30,220) =	1,760,557	48.73%
Non-Papuan population	(1,882,517 – 30,220) =	1,852,297	51.27%
Total population		3,612,854	100%

This analysis shows that the Papuans have become a minority in West Papua from being an overwhelming majority (96.09%) less than four decades ago.

### **Population projections to 2020**

It is reasonable to assume that the historical annual growth rates for each ethnic group will continue unless major policy changes are undertaken or agrees to by the Indonesian government. Non-Papuan migrants are drawn to West Papua by the economic opportunities generated by the massive natural resource extraction industries led by mining, oil and gas, logging and agriculture. Plans to convert millions of hectares of rainforest to oil palm and other plantation crops may even increase this rate.

Papuan growth rates are unlikely to increase, and may well decrease as the Papuan population receives poor health services and battles an HIV-AIDS epidemic. Many Papuans are also being displaced by natural resource developments as well as dispossessed of their traditional lands by migrants and the Indonesian government. Military ‘sweeping’ operations also affect considerable numbers of Papuans, disrupting normal existence and creating internal refugees.

If the Papuan 2010 population of 1,760,557 continues to increase at an annual rate of 1.84% there will be 2,112,681 Papuans in 2020. Likewise if the non-Papuan population continues to increase at its historical rate of 10.82% there will be 5,174,782 non-Papuans in 2020. This would give a total population of 7,287,463 of which Papuans would make up 28.99% and non-Papuans 71.01%.

Projected population breakdown for West Papua in 2020:

Papuan population	2,112,681	28.99%
Non-Papuan population	5,174,782	71.01%
Total population	7,287,463	100%

To achieve these population predictions the overall population growth rate of West Papua would have to increase from the current rate for Papua province of 5.46% (and that of much smaller Papua Barat province of 3.72%). To reach the figures in these projections the average annual growth rate of West Papua would be 6.44% in 2011, rising to 8.05% in 2020. This may seem like a large jump in the growth rate but it is probably already underway.

The weighted average annual growth rate for the two provinces that now make up West Papua is 5.09%. This reflects the average rate of growth over the decade to 2010 as recorded in the 2010 Indonesian census, not the actual growth rate of each year. From anecdotal eye-witness accounts this rate has increased over the course of the decade as many more migrants have come to West Papua by ship and aircraft. This means that the actual rate of growth at the end of the decade to 2010 may well have been more than 5.09%. It is therefore quite possible that the higher growth rates, given the strong pull factors for migrants to move to West Papua, will be achieved short of any change in Indonesian government policy.

These predictions clearly indicate the demographic catastrophe that is happening to the Papuan people. From 96.09% of the population in 1971 they will make up only 28.99% of the population in 2020; a small and rapidly dwindling minority.

### **Consequences of demographic transition and the minoritisation of the Papuans.**

Besides the fact that the Papuans are becoming a minority in the overall population, stark regional differences in the ethnic make up of different regions are apparent. In all sizeable towns and urban areas of West Papua eyewitness accounts put the non-Papuan population as a clear majority in excess of 70%. Conversely in rural and remote areas the Papuans still constitute a majority, where they are largely excluded from mainstream economic activity as well as adequate health and educational services. Such a racial divide holds severe consequences for the political stability of West Papua, and ultimately for Indonesia and the region.

Papuan political activism has grown rapidly in recent years in response to the demographic transformation that has engulfed them among other things. Younger Papuans in particular are refusing to accept what many non-Papuans in Indonesia and elsewhere presume is their inevitable fate. Demonstrations against special autonomy and Indonesian rule in general have increased dramatically in recent years, culminating in the mass protests and the occupation of the Papuan parliament building in July 2010. This puts the Papuan people on a collision course with the Indonesian state and its security apparatus, which regard "separatism" as a serious crime.

All this is exacerbated by the fact that the Papuans are Melanesians who are predominantly Christian and the non-Papuan migrants are Asians who are predominantly Muslim. Racial and religious tensions are inevitable, heightened by competition over land

and resources and the Papuans exclusion from the formal economy and paucity of government services that they receive.

In this situation conflict between the Papuans and the Indonesian state will intensify. The different racial breakdown of the cities and the bush, and the fact that many Papuans are openly expressing their dissatisfaction with the status quo and calling for independence, or at least a referendum on independence, is fuel to the fire of violent conflict. The Indonesian government's response is primarily military and repressive: viewing Papuan "separatists" as criminals, traitors and enemies of the Republic of Indonesia. It is a recipe for ongoing military operations to search for and destroy Papuan "separatists", a term that could be applied to a large, if not overwhelming, portion of the Papuan population.

While most of Indonesia has enjoyed a huge growth in democratic freedoms since the fall of ex-President Suharto in 1998, this has not been the case in West Papua. For the reasons explained above the Indonesian military retains almost absolute control over Papua and Papua Barat provinces. Civilian political figures and bodies in West Papua have little power to influence policy, and no say in how the military and police operate. There is a culture of complete impunity for security personnel guilty of frequent and gross human rights abuses, including murder and torture. Corruption is endemic, with some observers calling Papua now the most corrupt province in Indonesia. The Indonesian military, the TNI, having lost their previous power bases in East Timor and Aceh, ruthlessly maintain their control over West Papua, both as a power base and as a considerable source of revenue. TNI involvement in legal businesses, such as mining and logging, and illegal businesses, such as alcohol, prostitution, extortion, wildlife smuggling, etc., provide significant funds for the TNI as an organization and also for individual TNI members, especially senior officers. The TNI will vigorously defend its interests, which lie with maintaining the status quo and allowing the demographic transition outlined above to unfold.

This obviously leaves the Papuans in a dire situation. They see international intervention as necessary for Jakarta to engage in serious dialogue about their future. Most Papuans seem to have utterly lost faith in the Indonesian government and its ability to deal fairly with them. After decades of what is in effect an armed occupation, they feel that the Indonesian state is unable and unwilling to deal with them fairly and to give them even their most basic human rights as Indonesian citizens. Hence the pleas to the international community calling for recognition of their plight and for third party mediation – an outcome flatly rejected by Jakarta and the TNI. Thus the tensions fuelling the conflict in West Papua continue to intensify.

Besides the consequences for the Papuans, how events unfold in West Papua has serious implications for the whole of Indonesia. West Papua is rapidly becoming an international issue, tracking in some ways the history of East Timor. Modern communications technology allows information and images of TNI atrocities to spread rapidly across the globe. Films, newspaper articles and books are spreading knowledge of the conflict in West Papua amongst the Western intellectual elite, particularly in the media and religious and academic institutions. Should violence break out on a larger scale in West Papua,

which is quite likely given the situation outlined above, it will be quickly communicated around the world and splashed across newspapers and television sets. This would be a disaster for both the Papuans and the Indonesian government.

It was the 1991 Santa Cruz massacre in Dili, where Indonesian soldiers killed more than 200 East Timorese, that set the stage for East Timor's independence. It was the occupation of East Timor for 24 years that retarded Indonesia's natural role in international affairs given that it is the world's fourth most populous country, and the world's biggest Muslim nation. East Timor became the prism through which the world viewed Indonesia, saddling it with a reputation as a cruel military dictatorship brutally occupying East Timor. Is this to be Indonesia's future over West Papua? There is certainly the danger that events could unfold in this manner.

Should the situation in West Papua deteriorate and violent conflict grow there will also be repercussions for the West, particularly Australia and the US. Indonesia and Australia share a long border and sit uneasily together; two very different countries bound by geography to coexist as best they can. Australia's interests lie in promoting a strong, stable, democratic and peaceful Indonesia. Negative developments in West Papua, as outlined above, would be the worst outcome imaginable for the bilateral relationship.

The US has perhaps even more at stake. In the global conflict between radical Islam and the West, Indonesia has been held up as a model Muslim nation. Indonesia shows that Islam can co-exist with and even underpin democracy (apart from West Papua). The West views Indonesia as a 'moderate' Islamic nation. Although basic human rights are still imperfectly upheld in Indonesia, the situation is widely seen as vastly improved from the Suharto era. The treatment of women, in particular, is rightly lauded. The US believes that many of the world's Muslim nations have much to learn from Indonesia and that following the Indonesian example will improve global security by undercutting radical Islam. For its part, Indonesia sees its destiny as an important player in world affairs and particularly in the family of Islamic nations, where it is the largest. These are very positive developments.

However should the conflict in West Papua escalate and negative images and stories of human rights abuses come to dominate the international image of Indonesia once again, these positive developments could be eclipsed. Indonesia will want to vociferously defend its sovereignty over West Papua, a sentiment deeply held across the archipelago, and above all in the military. But unless the military abuses and impunity are addressed by the government its relations with the West, including the US, may well sour in response to a deteriorating situation in West Papua. This in turn could affect Indonesia's somewhat fragile economic situation -- as vulnerable as ever to massive and widespread corruption. Politically, too, the situation keeps alive the possibility of a military comeback in Indonesia as a whole in response to economic meltdown.

That is a final reason why attention must be paid to the political situation in West Papua. As in all human conflicts middle ground can be found. Yet if the demographic trends



discussed in this paper unfold as predicted the conflict in West Papua can only worsen, with negative consequences for all players.

### **Epilogue: “Slow Motion Genocide”?**

Many West Papuan leaders think that they are suffering genocide under Indonesian rule. On the face of it, looking at the figures analysed in this paper, that would not appear to be the case. The Papuan population is still growing, albeit at a much slower rate than the non-Papuan population. There are not mass killings taking place at the moment, or in recent years, only ongoing systematic human rights abuses, up to and including murder. Yet what is happening to the Papuans is an immense tragedy and is threatening the long term survival of at least those groups heavily impacted by the mass inward migration of non-Papuan Indonesians. Everywhere people are living tense and fearful lives under the rule of the violent and unaccountable Indonesian military and police.

What is the correct term to describe the Papuans’ dilemma? Some have called it a ‘swamping’. Clemens Runawery, a West Papuan elder spokesman living in Papua New Guinea, has called it a ‘slow motion genocide’<sup>4</sup> by which he means a process like that which occurred to the indigenous people in Australia and the United States, and to a slightly lesser degree in Canada and New Zealand. The process of the settler peoples taking over the land and resources of the traditional owners by force and turning them into small minorities through large-scale immigration. Some people consider that genocide is the appropriate term for this process; some people do not. While now in the ‘new’ Western countries the emphasis is on reconciliation and saying ‘sorry’, this process is still unfolding in West Papua.

From the Indonesian viewpoint the Papuans are Indonesian citizens, albeit recalcitrant, and some even traitorous for trying to break up the country, but nonetheless, citizens. And West Papua is most definitely, for most observers, part of Indonesia confirmed by the United Nations. Therefore the movement of Indonesian citizens from over crowded regions to sparsely populated and resource rich areas like West Papua is logical and necessary for the development of the nation. Jakarta is acutely sensitive to outside interference in what they see as strictly internal problem. However, for the reasons I have explained above, it is an international problem because it has international ramifications.

There is also the very real concern that a more familiar genocidal situation is developing. In recent genocides, such in Rwanda in the 1990’s, and more recently in Sudan, different ethnic groups have perpetrated genocide on their neighbours for a variety of reasons, one of which is conflict over resources, especially land. There is a profound split in West Papua’s population between the original Papuans and the newly arrived non-Papuans. It’s a split along racial, religious and cultural lines. It is also a split on economic perceptions: the Papuans believe that they own their traditional lands and resources: the Indonesian state does not recognize this. The incoming non-Papuans are drawn by those resources and the economic opportunities that the exploitation of them creates. The two population

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<sup>4</sup> Clemens Runawery talking at the Australian Institute of International Affairs (SA), Adelaide University, South Australia, 21<sup>st</sup> September, 2006.

groups are, in effect, competing over the resources, especially land. This is what happened to the indigenous peoples of the new West, and the indigenous people lost out every time until the very recent past.

It is appropriate, indeed a responsibility under the UN Genocide Convention, to hear the Papuans claims of genocide and investigate them properly. It would be in all parties interests, even Indonesia'. If genocide is not occurring in West Papua the Indonesian government should have nothing to hide; if it is the situation can be addressed before it slides out of control, with all the repercussions already discussed. This should be a first step taken by the international community in addressing the West Papuan issue – an international fact-finding mission to see first hand what is going on in the troubled region. Indonesia has no valid reason to block such a mission and I believe that it would be in their interests – a chance to begin moving along the road to a long-term solution to the self-imposed problem of West Papua.