

West Papua: Thousands Rally For Independence Despite Shootings & Arrests

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AFP and other news agencies reported that thousands of people rallied across West Papua on Friday April 3, 2009 to call for independence from Indonesia and a boycott of elections amidst a police crackdown on dissent.

At least four people were wounded when police opened fire on a subsequent demonstration on Monday April 6 according to a local church activist, Yones Douw, quoted in the Catholic News website.

“Our demand is that Papuans don’t take part in the election because we are not part of Indonesia” - Yones Douw, independence activist

Douw said he saw protesters falling wounded when police fired during a clash with around 200 indigenous Papuans rallying in the streets of Nabire town, Papua province.

“The people didn’t react or throw anything but Brimob (paramilitary police) attacked them,” Douw said.

He said four protesters were in “critical” condition in hospital after being hit with live rounds. Three others were hit with rubber bullets. One woman was arrested at the rally.

One police officer was wounded after being shot with an arrow, Douw said.

Arrests

On April 3 police raided the offices of the Papuan Customary Council, the top representative body for indigenous Papuans in the provincial capital Jayapura, arresting 15 activists and damaging equipment, council secretary general Leonard Imbiri told AFP.

“They trashed the offices, destroyed two computers and they burnt down a traditional hut behind the building,” Imbiri said.

One person was shot and injured by police in this raid, Douw said.

Vico Yeimo, the head of the West Papua National Committee, said the activists were arrested on suspicion of trying to organise a rally in the city, an earlier request for which was turned down by police.

Papua police chief Bagus Eko Danto refused to confirm the arrests or the damage to the assembly.

Thousands of activists took to the streets in the towns of Nabire and Wamena on April 3 to call for Papuans to boycott national legislative elections next week and in solidarity with the establishment abroad of an international pressure group called International Lawyers for West Papua, activists

said.

Around 12,000 Papuans led by 50 men in traditional penis gourds and feathers marched through Nabire with no arrests, Yones Douw said.

“Our demand is that Papuans don’t take part in the election because we are not part of Indonesia,” he explained.

West Papua, which sits on the western end of New Guinea island, was officially incorporated into Indonesia in a 1969 UN-backed vote of tribal elders widely seen to have been stage-managed.

Other local activists reported that the police and TNI (Indonesia National Army) arrested six civilians, burned down the Papua Emergency Camp at Oyehe, Nabire, and set up roadblocks around the town.

Support for independence is high among indigenous Papuans, who are Melanesians ethnically distinct from other Indonesians, the AFP report concluded, while the Indonesian government continued to restrict access to the area by foreign media.

Call for Australian parliamentary investigation team

As the situation deteriorated further in West Papua with more arrests and the shooting of protesters, the Australia West Papua Association called on the Australian Government to send observers to investigate the human rights situation in West Papua.

Joe Collins of AWP said “the Australian Government says it continues to raise the human rights situation in West Papua with the Indonesian Government, however, from recent events just raising the issue is not enough. The Australian Government should immediately send observers from the Australian embassy in Jakarta to report to the government on the the current situation in the territory. This visit should be followed by a cross-party delegation to investigate the human rights situation there”.

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* From ASAP:

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