

What Can Australia Do To Prevent Human Rights Abuses in West Papua?

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Introduction

Abstract: *West Papua, Australia's near northern neighbour, has for nearly six decades experienced widespread human rights abuses by the Indonesian state and military. In this article we argue that Australia has the responsibility and the expertise to do more to ensure that West Papuans' human rights are being upheld. First, in a situation as serious as that of West Papua, Australia, as a member of the United Nations, we contend, has a political duty to intervene under the United Nation's 'responsibility to protect' doctrine. Second, we put forward that Australia also has a historic and moral obligation to the territory: West Papuans provided vital assistance to Australian troops in 1944 during World War 2. In the 1960s, however, Canberra betrayed its neighbour's preparations for self-determination but we argue Australia now has a chance to right this historical wrong by intervening in West Papua's struggle against Indonesian oppression. Third, we argue that because Australia has set a precedent of intervention when it led the humanitarian intervention in East Timor in 1999-2000, we know that intervention is possible and that the necessary political will can be mustered. Whereas Australia's involvement in the East Timor crisis led to long term diplomatic tension between Australia and Indonesia, however, we propose that in this case, Australia's contribution to addressing human rights in West Papua could ultimately strengthen ties between the two countries.*

In August 2019, a series of demonstrations of unprecedented size broke out across the large contested territory of West Papua.¹ Initially protesting against racial violence and attacks on West Papuan university students in Java, Indonesia (Barker September 2019a), the demonstrations escalated across West Papua in the wake of the global resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement following the 2020 racist killing of George Floyd in the USA by white police officers (Yaung 2020). The ongoing protests brought attention to similar social injustices suffered by Indigenous Papuans at the hands of Indonesian security forces in West Papua. Over 50 people have now been killed by Indonesian security forces and Jihadi inspired militia since August 2019 (Blades 2020). Australian civil society organisations have repeatedly requested that the Australian government seek to work with the government in Jakarta to put an end to human rights abuses in West Papua (see, for example, Australia West Papua Association 2018a and 2019a). Canberra, however, has routinely and limply responded that it respects Indonesia's sovereignty over West Papua and has been assured by Indonesian government officials that Jakarta is investigating all allegations of abuses (see, for example, Australia West Papua Association 2018b and 2019b).

This article argues that Australia, West Papua's closest southern neighbour, has the responsibility and the capacity to do more than it currently does to ensure that West Papuans' human rights are upheld. Working in

partnership with Indonesia's Komisi Nasional Hak Asasi Manusia (National Commission on Human Rights) may be the best means of progressing a collaborative investigation, a proposal addressed later in this article.

First, the article illustrates the gravity of the conflict in West Papua. As a member of the United Nations (UN), Australia has a political duty to intervene under the UN's 'responsibility to protect' (R2P) doctrine. Second, Australia also has a historic and moral obligation to West Papuans since they provided critical assistance to Australian forces during World War 2 when in 1944 the troops landed in what is now West Papua's largest city, Jayapura (Fox 2017). Nonetheless, the Australian Government subsequently betrayed West Papuans' advanced preparations for self-determination (which, together with the Dutch government, it had previously backed) by supporting the 1962 New York Agreement in which the Netherlands was forced to hand over control of West Papua not to Papuans, but to Indonesia (see Saltford 2003, 14). Intervening now would give Australia a chance to finally make reparations for its past neglect of its moral obligations to the Papuan people.

Third, we argue that Australia has set a precedent for intervention by leading the humanitarian intervention in East Timor in 1999-2000 prior to the arrival of UN peacekeepers. Because of this, we know that the Australian government *can* summon the political will when under ample pressure from civil society and in a sufficiently dire situation. Whereas Australia's military involvement in the East Timor crisis led to long term diplomatic tension between Australia and Indonesia, however, we propose that Australia's contribution to addressing human rights in West Papua could ultimately strengthen ties between the two countries.

West Papua

There is a *prima facie* case that crimes against humanity have been committed by Indonesian military forces and their militias against West Papuans. Crimes against humanity, under the 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, include murder, torture, forced transfer of populations, and acts that intentionally cause great suffering knowingly committed against civilians of a population (International Criminal Court 1998). Since invading West Papua in 1962, Indonesia's occupation of the territory has been marked by acts of brutality that fall clearly within the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court classification of crimes against humanity (see United Nations n.d.). Reports by leading analysts of the West Papua conflict have documented decades of instances of rape, torture, summary executions, disappearances, land seizures, cultural appropriation and denigration, illegal imprisonment, economic exploitation, racism, intimidation and political oppression inflicted on indigenous West Papuans by agents of the Indonesian state (Asian Human Rights Commission 2010, Brundige et al 2004, Budiardjo and Liem 1983, Hernawan 2018, Karma 2014, Ondawame 2010 and Osborne 1985). Several of this article's authors published a 'massacre map' of the atrocities committed in West Papua under Indonesia's watch from the 1970s to the 2010s (Webb-Gannon, Swift, Westaway and Wright 2020). We outline here some of the more egregious examples captured in the map below (see Figure 1).

Australia has a responsibility to protect

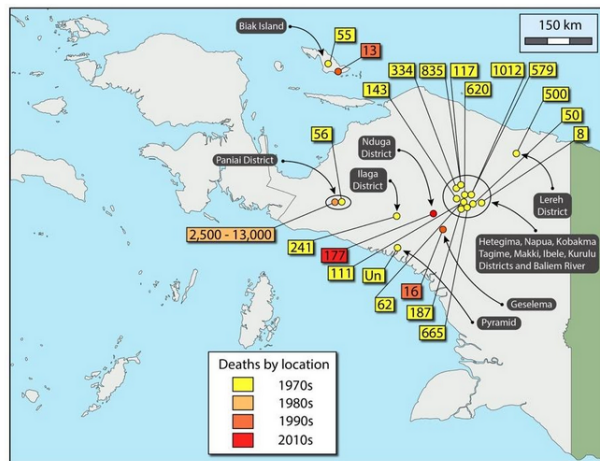


Figure 1: Map of human rights abuses in West Papua: 1970s-2010s. Source: Authors

A broad-sweeping military operation codenamed Operasi Kikis (Operation ‘Chipping Away’) was executed in the Central Highlands of West Papua in 1977 and 1978. Indonesia never produced an official death toll for the operation but the former governor of Papua, Eliezer Bonay, estimated the number of deaths to be 3,000 (Tebay 2004, 5). Those who lived through the operation counted 4,146 deaths and reported being subject to strafing from AK47 rifles and napalm bombs, anti-personnel cluster bombs, and mortar bombs (Asian Human Rights Commission 2013, 10 and 24, see Figure 1 above). The use of napalm against civilians is banned in the United Nations Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and the use of cluster bombs is prohibited under the Convention on Cluster Munitions.

In 1981, the Indonesian military attacked the village of Madi in the Paniai Basin of the Central Highlands, killing up to 13,000 people (Osborne 1985, 88, see Figure 1 above). Based on reports from survivors, it is suspected that napalm and possibly other chemical weapons were used (Osborne 1985, 88). In 1996, following the kidnapping by the West Papuan nationalist army (the TPN-PB) of a group of European zoology students in the highlands

village of Gesemlema, a Red Cross helicopter bearing the Red Cross insignia that had been commandeered by Indonesian military personnel shot dead 16 West Papuans at close range (see Figure 1 above). The Papuans had gathered to greet the helicopter which they had assumed was carrying Red Cross representatives who had come to negotiate with the kidnappers and deliver provisions (Davis 1999). In 1998, Indonesian security forces shot into a crowd of West Papuans who were peacefully protesting for independence around the water tower in Biak City on the island of Biak. Victims were taken out to sea on naval vessels and their bodies were disposed of—dismembered corpses washed ashore for several weeks afterward. Hundreds of people were injured, tortured and sexually mutilated (ELSHAM 2013).

Since December 2018, Indonesian security forces have been carrying out a counterinsurgency operation in the highlands regency of Nduga. As of October 2019, this had resulted in at least 189 West Papuan deaths (International Coalition for Papua 2019, 5) and the displacement of 44,821 Indigenous Nduga residents (Wangge and Webb-Gannon 2020, 287). Allegations that white phosphorus projectiles were used on West Papuans have been rejected by Indonesian authorities, but Nduga residents have provided photographs of injuries they claim were caused by phosphorus (see Figure 2 below; Martin 2018). The Indonesian security forces continue to occupy Nduga at the time of writing.



Figure 2: Alleged white phosphorus burn to a Nduga resident's leg.

Photo: Sent to journalist Mark Davis from a confidential source in Nduga Regency.

The crimes against humanity described above comprise only a few of the many atrocities that characterise West Papua's history under Indonesian rule. In 2005, all UN member countries committed to a doctrine known as the 'responsibility to protect', or R2P (United Nations General Assembly, 2005; United Nations General Assembly Security Council, 2017). This principle was formulated following the failure of the international community to prevent the atrocities in Rwanda and the Balkans in the 1990s. It affirms the responsibility of signatories to the doctrine to refrain from committing genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and ethnic cleansing in their own states and to prevent and punish these atrocities in other states. It also holds the international community (that is,

UN member states) responsible for using diplomacy, humanitarian intervention or other measures to protect populations in other states when those states are unable or unwilling to do so themselves. It would hold then that under the R2P doctrine, Australia has a responsibility to prevent the ongoing crimes against humanity that are taking place in West Papua.

Helping West Papuans now is an opportunity to pay historical reparations

Not only does Australia have an obligation to West Papuans under the R2P doctrine, the Australian government now has a chance to pay reparations to and make up for its historical betrayal of West Papua. The territory has a complicated colonial past, subject to the capricious agendas of the world powers with vested interests in the region. The old European colonial regimes that had once controlled people and commerce across much of Asia and the Pacific were overthrown and largely (albeit briefly) replaced in the Japanese Empire during World War Two.

When Australian troops joined US and Royal Netherlands East Indies Army troops on April 22, 1944 to fight the Japanese in what is present day Jayapura, they were aided by West Papuans who provided them with accommodation, guidance through the jungles, and hospital care (Fox 2017). Even earlier on, West Papuans contributed to intelligence gathering for the Allied forces, spying on and sabotaging Japanese operations in their territory—although their efforts were not always appreciated by those engaging their assistance. For example, the Australian anthropologist Donald Thomson, sent by the First Australian Army to Dutch New Guinea to carry out a reconnaissance mission, described a crew of indigenous West Papuans making his journey through the rough terrain possible as knowing "nothing of discipline, nothing of hygiene, and less of navigation" (1953, 8). That

same expedition's cook was hardly more complimentary, calling the food offered by locals to supplement the Australian crew's rations "bloody Boong's tucker" (Thomson 1953, 8). Other Australians fighting in West Papua during World War Two have fonder memories of the assistance provided by West Papuans. Sergeant James Burrowes remembers the efforts of individual West Papuans—Yali, Mas, Buka, Mariba—in the Allied Intelligence Bureau known as the 'Coastwatchers' (2016). Mas and Buka were killed in a Japanese ambush. "'Without the Coastwatchers'", Burrowes recalls the Commander of the US 7th Fleet, Admiral Halsey, declaring, "'the Pacific War would not have been won'" (2016). Similarly, a photograph in the Australian War Memorial archives shows a Lance Corporal of the Field Security Section (FSS) of the Australian Intelligence Corp, Errol Smith, standing companionably aboard a canoe with his West Papuan (Marind Anim) interpreters (see Figure 3 below). The FSS relied on local people for intelligence about Japanese movements (Australian War Memorial 1944).



Figure 3 Eilanden River, Dutch New Guinea, November 1944.

Lance Corporal Errol Smith stands with his Marind Anim interpreters Sarah, Susie and Pedrovitj.

Photo: Australian War Memorial National Gallery

In arguing that Australia is indebted to West Papuans, we are not suggesting that West Papuans were acting out of naïve loyalty to western powers for which Australia should be ongoingly grateful. The reality was and is more complex than that. It was often coercion, not loyalty, which prompted indigenous assistance to Allied forces. Rather than gratitude, Australians owe West Papuans something more akin to reparations. Certainly, on the eastern side of New Guinea, present day Papua New Guinea, it was recognised by local elders that local war labourers were not so much recruited as "taken" by Allied forces to enable their war efforts (Winter 2020, 355). If New Guineans were considered disloyal by the Allies, the consequences were dire. Ten New Guineans were hanged by Australian authorities for treason (Banivanua Mar 2016, 120). Collaboration between locals on both sides of the island and the Allied troops cannot be disentangled from colonial power in the region. Of course, not all instances of local support for Australian troops in New Guinea emerged from coercion or even a sense of obligation to colonial 'masters'. Many cross-cultural bonds of a personal nature, characterised by respect and deep care, were formed: "relational loyalties were forged on a local level, beyond national loyalties or the binaries of 'friend and foe'" (Winter 2020 343). Nonetheless, Papuans on both sides of the island suffered and made sacrifices on their own land to help defend Australia from Imperial Japan—whole villages were bombed and/or relocated, crops and livestock were commandeered by Allied troops, labour recruitment led to disrupted gardening and starvation, and education was delayed (Winter 2020, 357). These sacrifices and sufferings during World War Two helped protect Australia from Japan's southward advance. Australia now has a chance to repay West Papuans in kind by standing up for West Papuans' human rights in their time of great need.

Despite West Papuan assistance in WW2, Australia abandons West Papua

The Japanese military regime was driven out of Melanesia in 1945. After World War Two the United Kingdom, Portugal and the Netherlands realised that their colonial structures were no longer viable (Cribb 2010, 68) and generally not supported by the new global superpower, the USA. In 1949, when Indonesia gained its independence from the Netherlands, it pushed for West Papua to be included as part of its new state, ostensibly relying on the international legal principle of *uti possidetis juris* in which the territorial boundaries of a decolonised state are formed to match the boundaries of the former colony. However, although the territories of Indonesia and West Papua were both subject to Dutch colonisation, they were administered separately, in effect rendering the principle of *uti possidetis juris* irrelevant in this case. And the Dutch, hoping to maintain at least some influence in the Pacific once it had relinquished its colonies, did not intend to hand West Papua over to Indonesia. The Dutch administration began to prepare West Papua for independent nation statehood. By 1961, the transition to self-governance was well underway and unifying national symbols including a flag, a national anthem and a name for their state—West Papua - had been established. In response, Indonesia commenced military incursions into West Papua. Fearing that Jakarta would turn to Communist countries for support in its quest to wrest West Papua from the Dutch, the US Kennedy administration brokered what became known as the 1962 New York Agreement between Indonesia and the Netherlands, in which West Papua was initially administered as a United Nations trust territory and then later placed under Indonesian administration. West Papuans were not consulted about this sudden change. The Agreement stipulated that by 1969 an act of self-determination would be held for

West Papuans in which they would be given a chance to vote for independence or official integration with Indonesia. It did not, however, dictate how that vote should be carried out.

Up until 1962, Canberra had repeatedly expressed support for Dutch plans for an independent West Papua, concerned that if Indonesia acquired West Papua, it might then seek control of the eastern half of the island, the Territory of Papua and New Guinea, which was under Australian administration (Saltford 2003, 7, 13-14). With Indonesian military incursions into West Papua increasing, Washington refused to back the Dutch militarily in the event of armed clashes with Indonesia over West Papua. As a result, the Dutch relinquished their claim for West Papuans of self-determination and Australia followed suit (Saltford 2003, 13-14). In fact, the latter had so changed its strategic and diplomatic direction that by January 1962, Canberra was “giving active encouragement to the transfer of sovereignty to Indonesia” (Jenkins 1993, 4).

Australia’s about-face on independence was a serious blow to West Papuan hopes, and was felt even more deeply in 1969, immediately before the staging of the act of self-determination set out in the New York Agreement (Rollo 2013). Two West Papuan activists, Clemens Runawery and Wim Zonggenau, having observed the violence and injustices under which preparations for the referendum were taking place, had crossed the border from West Papua into the Australian-administered territory of Papua and New Guinea. They were on their way to the United Nations to deliver testimonies from West Papuan leaders and to warn the world that the plebiscite was going to be a farce. In preparing for the so-called Act of Free Choice (still known locally as the Act of No Choice), Indonesia handpicked a select number of West Papuans who comprised less than one percent of the population whom they coerced, with threats of

violence, to choose integration with Indonesia. Australian officials intercepted Runawery and Zonggenau and detained them on Manus Island, refusing to let them deliver their message to the world (Runawery 2009). Although UN staff on the ground knew of the deeply flawed process of the vote (United States Embassy 1969), in the context of the Cold War, and hoping to counteract Indonesia's communist leanings, the international community acquiesced to West Papua's annexation to Indonesia.

While several other former colonial states in the Pacific have achieved their independence through peaceful means (for example, Papua New Guinea from Australia in 1975, and Solomon Islands from Britain in 1978), the only state to break free from Indonesia—East Timor—did so through violent and bloody conflict and, ultimately, UN support, in 1999. The nature of decolonisation today would still seem to be largely dependent on the political and economic priorities of western governments, as it was in the 1960s for West Papua. As such, and given the debt owed to West Papua by Australia since World War Two, it should be a political priority for the Australian government to work with Indonesia towards ending atrocities in the territory.

Australia has the capacity to make a difference in West Papua

Former Australian Prime Minister John Howard (1996-2007) stated that contributing to the independence of East Timor was one of his key achievements on the international stage (Barker 2019b).² Where early Australian intervention was critical in East Timor was at the very local level where Australian Federal Police (AFP), working as unarmed civilian police for the United Nations Assistance Mission in East Timor (UNAMET), were placed to assist with the conduct of the independence referendum. These Australian officers

disobeyed requests by their superiors to abandon a compound where some 3,000 East Timorese had taken shelter from the murderous rampage of Indonesian-backed militia (Martinkus 2015). Amanda Vanstone, a former Howard-government senator, stated: "AFP officers were amongst the first international contingents into East Timor, having served there since July 1999, when they played a significant role in the successful conduct of the self-determination ballot. ... It was in fact, only the unarmed civilian police, mostly Australian and led by an Australian, who refused to give up when others were ready to leave East Timor. They stood between armed militia and the defenceless people of East Timor. Without that group and their willingness, or determination, to hold on in a desperate and dangerous situation, the United Nations may have in fact withdrawn" (Hansard 2000). John Martinkus, an Australian journalist present in the compound, noted that it was through the actions of Australian police and their refusal to abandon the East Timorese that a Srebrenica-style massacre was avoided (Martinkus 2015).

On 20 September 1999 Australia led the International Force East Timor (INTERFET) under the command of Major-General Peter Cosgrove, into East Timor. The force was able, by February 2000, to gain control over land and sea points of entry into East Timor. It gained control of the security situation within East Timor, helped transition East Timor from INTERFET control to that of the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET), and redeployed INTERFET troops to UNTEAT or to home locations (Nautilus Institute n.d.). Australia did not achieve all of this alone, of course. Assistance from New Zealand, the UK, Thailand, the Philippines and the US, among other countries, was critical. Nevertheless, Australia's logistical expertise, geographical location (considerable military infrastructure and support necessarily came from Darwin) (Gosling 2019), familiarity with

Indonesian military capabilities and relationships with Indonesian key military figures (Dickens 2001) were vital to the success of the peace enforcing mission. According to East Timor expert John Blaxland, “In essence, the 1999 East Timor intervention led to a shift in perceptions of how Australia should see itself and what it could and should do to act decisively in its neighbourhood” (2015). What would it take for Australia, perhaps in partnership with other countries, to apply the same policies that it employed so effectively in East Timor to the crisis in West Papua? Australia and New Zealand have both made it clear that they are hesitant to intervene in human rights crises in their region, particularly when Indonesia is involved. In 2006 Australia signed the Lombok Treaty assuring Indonesia it would respect the sovereignty of the Indonesian state. A policy of appeasement for Indonesia appears to be the norm, regardless of the political persuasion of the Australian government of the day, and even the current progressive New Zealand prime minister, Jacinda Ardern, has avoided discussion on the topic (Leadbeater 2019).

Media played a critical role in forcing the hand of the US, Australia and their counterparts to intervene in the East Timor conflict, and it appears the Indonesian security forces gained significant operational intelligence from this experience. In recent years a complete media ban, denial of requests from the UN Human Rights Commission to investigate atrocities and human rights violations, and the cutting of internet services over the past year, have played a key role in suppressing information and media that may raise support for the independence movement in West Papua. Social media, however, continues to leak out of West Papua and highlights the nature of torture as well as attacks on protestors. For example, a video circulated on Twitter in February 2020 showed the Indonesian police interrogating a terrified young West Papuan male by wrapping a large snake around him (Davidson 2019).

Other civilian videos show protesters being shot at by security forces (The Guardian 2019). Recent media accounts suggest that Jihadis were also recruited to suppress the recent West Papuan protests (Kingsbury 2019). And it has been reported that the Indonesian government is developing new diplomatic programs in an attempt to dilute Pacific Island states’ (FSM, Nauru, Tuvalu, Solomon Islands and Fiji) opposition to Indonesian human rights violations and support for West Papuan independence (Wyeth 2018). We know from the East Timor crisis that a major reason why Australia’s reluctant politicians finally agreed to the humanitarian intervention was due to pressure from the Australian public (Fernandes n.d.). Is it possible that social media from West Papua, as well as mainstream media accounts of abuses within Papua (for example, with Jihadi-associated militia) might eventually lead to a similar torrent of public outrage that would pressure the Australian government to act? We have seen from East Timor that Australia *can* take effective action to bring an end to human rights abuses. What is required is the political will—something civil society can help to build.

Australia also needs to reflect on the best way to become involved. INTERFET cast a long shadow on relations between Indonesia and Australia. Indonesia considered Australia’s role in the intervention to be perfidy, given the major shift it represented in Australia’s “traditional accommodationalist policy towards Jakarta” (Chalk 2001, 233). Because of this perceived betrayal, Indonesia is wary of “the oft-repeated statements of Australia’s recognition of Indonesian sovereignty in Papua, as written in the Lombok Treaty”, which “are not taken at face value in Jakarta. The unspoken response is that this was what Australia said about Timor Leste, until it mattered” (Chauvel 2019). To avoid further aggravating Australia’s relationship with Indonesia—one in which old wounds have perhaps only partially healed—any Australian move with regard to West Papua would need to

affirm Australia's trust in Indonesians' good will toward West Papuans, be collaborative at the grassroots as well as diplomatic levels, and offer a win to both Jakarta and West Papuans. The remainder of this article discusses one proposal for such an approach.

Could Australia partner with Indonesia to improve human rights in West Papua?

Australian collaboration with Indonesian actors and institutions toward improved human rights in West Papua could operate at three levels. At the grassroots level, civil society in Australia could partner with civil society supporters of West Papuan rights in Indonesia to put pressure on the Indonesian government. Encouragingly, solidarity for West Papua from within Indonesia is growing rapidly at present, possibly due to Indonesia's heightened awareness of racism in the context of the global Black Lives Matter movement (Koman and Kareni 2020). Prominent Indonesian activists for West Papua currently residing in Australia include, for example, Veronica Koman, a human rights lawyer who has given pro bono legal assistance to West Papuan activists standing trial in 2019 in Indonesia and who is a member of the Jayapura-based Human Rights Lawyers Association for Papua (see Octavianti 2020). Another is Hipolitus Wangge, an Indonesian academic undertaking a PhD in Australia, who spent three months in the West Papuan highlands regency of Nduga volunteering to help internally displaced persons fleeing an Indonesian military counterinsurgency (Wangge and Webb-Gannon 2020). There are also Indonesians who have a long history of supporting human rights in West Papua. Muridan Widjojo was an Indonesian scholar who, prior to his death in 2014, passionately advocated for peace in West Papua and hoped to broker dialogue between West Papuan and Indonesian government representatives. Andreas Harsono is an Indonesian researcher

for Human Rights Watch based in Indonesia who monitors human rights violations in West Papua and advocates for justice. Budi Hernawan is an Indonesian academic and former Franciscan brother who worked for a church-based human rights organisation in West Papua for more than a decade. These are only a few of the many Indonesians working to stem human rights abuses in West Papua.

Pro-democracy advocates within Indonesia have joined West Papuans in calling for UN sanctioned human rights investigations into the crisis on Australia's doorstep (Verroya 2020). Indonesia is not a member of the International Criminal Court (ICC), the only international body that can undertake investigations into crimes against humanity and genocide within its member countries. Indonesia does, however, hold a seat on the Human Rights Council. If the UN Security Council is convinced that human rights abuses or genocidal acts are being conducted by a state, the Security Council can refer the situation to the ICC and ask the latter institution to undertake an investigation. At a minimum, the UN needs to undertake an independent investigation of other alleged human rights abuses, and now that Indonesia has a seat on the UN Human Rights Council, it should fully support such an investigation. The military still has much political influence in Indonesia, and bringing to account commanders who have committed human rights abuses seems to be politically difficult within the Indonesian legal system—with UN assistance, however, this may be feasible.³ Australians standing in solidarity with West Papua could strengthen ties with Indonesians doing the same to amplify calls for a UN investigation into human rights abuses in West Papua. Collaboration through webinars on important human rights issues in West Papua is another way Australian, Indonesian and West Papuan civil society members are working together to advocate for West Papuan rights. For example, in August 2020, Hipolitus Wangge appeared on a webinar with Australian and

West Papuan activists that discussed why the proposed extension of Jakarta's Special Autonomy law in West Papua would be a violation of Papuans' right to self-determination (West Papua Project and International Academics for West Papua 2020) receiving 1,257 views on YouTube.

At the state diplomacy level, Australia would need to persuade Jakarta that a collaboration with Australia to this end would benefit Indonesia. Indonesia has been internationally condemned over its handling of human rights abuses in West Papua. Eighty-four countries have called for the United Nations Human Rights Commissioner to be allowed into West Papua to conduct a fact finding mission (ULMWP 2021) to investigate human rights abuses. Indonesia might be able to be convinced that working with a regional democratic power—Australia—toward improving human rights in West Papua would relieve, in the short term, some of the international pressure on Jakarta. The Australian government could encourage the Indonesian government to provide more support to Komnas HAM, Indonesia's national human rights commission, to investigate security forces' breaches of human rights in West Papua. Komnas HAM has reported being under-resourced (Iswinarno and Suri 2020) and its findings in a major human rights investigation in Paniai, West Papua, have been dismissed by the Indonesian government (Gorbiano and Sutrisno 2020). By urging Indonesia to strengthen its own internal human rights monitoring mechanisms, Australia could avoid the appearance of interfering with Indonesian sovereignty over West Papua.

Building on the second level, a third, or technical, level of collaboration may also be possible. Australia could offer the assistance of its experts with experience in the prosecution of war criminals. This could occur in tandem with a UN investigation. For example, after the Bosnian massacres, grave site excavations led

by Australian forensic archaeologist Emeritus Professor Richard Wright, in conjunction with an investigation supported by an Australian Federal Agent at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (the ICTY), provided clear evidence of crimes relating to genocidal acts by senior Yugoslav military officers against Islamic Serbs. This resulted in the successful prosecution of a number of war criminals. Alternatively, if Indonesia is opposed to a UN investigation into human rights in West Papua, Australian forensic scientists and human rights experts could work bilaterally with Indonesia's human rights commission, Komnas HAM, to gather evidence of atrocities in West Papua. Indonesia would need to be willing to bring the evidence to trial and prosecute, however, for such an approach to end impunity for rogue elements of the Indonesian military. This would obviously benefit West Papuans, but would also benefit Indonesia by building the professional capacity of Komnas HAM.

Conclusion

Individual Australians have had the courage to stand up to crimes against humanity perpetrated by the Indonesian military and militias in the past. Australian Federal Police officers caught children being thrown over the razor wire fence at the Dili compound in East Timor by parents desperate to save their children from the rampaging Indonesian militia. Australian soldiers were parachuted in to secure the Dili wharf, surrounded by heavily armed Indonesian military and militia, and anxiously awaited the main relief fleet from Darwin to arrive and help put an end to the bloodshed. Investigators and forensic archaeologists excavated the mass graves of Srebrenica under threat of Bosnian snipers. In each of these examples, Australians have demonstrated they have the moral fibre to help neighbours and those further afield in need.

West Papuans are Australia's neighbours, and they are also in need. Australia needs to step up once again to show regional leadership in protecting human rights.

We have argued in this article that there are three reasons why Australia is obliged to do so. As a signatory to the United Nations 'responsibility to protect' doctrine, Australia is required to intervene when other states are unable or unwilling to prevent atrocities within their borders. We presented our 'massacre map' of West Papua, and cited evidence that crimes against humanity are being committed by Indonesian security forces in West Papua. Based on the evidence presented in this paper, Australia has a responsibility to prevent these crimes from continuing. Australia also has a responsibility to help West Papua as a debt of gratitude stretching back to World War Two, and also as an apology for turning a blind eye to Indonesia's rigging of the 1969 so-called Act of Free Choice. Third, Australia should help West Papua because it *can* help West Papua—it has the resources and expertise to do so. We proposed that there are three levels at which Australia might work with Indonesia to put an end to atrocity crimes in West Papua. First, concerned sectors of civil society in Australia and Indonesia could collaborate to raise awareness of human rights violations in West Papua and to call for a UN investigation into those violations. In many ways this has already been occurring. Second, Australia could work with Indonesia at a diplomatic level to convince Indonesia to strengthen its own internal human rights watchdog, Komnas HAM. Third, Australian experts with technical skills in investigating war crimes and crimes against humanity could collaborate in a capacity building partnership with Komnas HAM to collect evidence of abuses in West Papua, if Indonesia would agree to cooperate and prosecute.

The key to the success of any or all of these approaches is collaboration. Indonesia is

extremely sensitive to challenges to its sovereignty. To avoid further diplomatic breakdown of relations between Canberra and Jakarta, Australian efforts to stop human rights abuses in West Papua should, in the first instance, include attempts to partner with Indonesia. This article has argued a normative case for Australia to support calls for a formal investigation into abuses in West Papua, either by the UN or by a better resourced Komnas HAM. Australia has the technical capacity to facilitate such an investigation. What remains in question is whether the Australian government has the courage and political will to become involved. Significant pressure from civil society can overturn government reluctance to act. It is our hope, as a collective of concerned Australian forensic archaeology and human rights specialists, that as evidence of atrocities mount up, Canberra will finally decide to fulfil to its ethical responsibilities.

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Notes

¹ The contested territory comprising the western half of the island of New Guinea, currently divided by Indonesia into the provinces of Papua and West Papua, has been known by many names over the course of its colonial history. This article uses the name ‘West Papua’, a political moniker, to describe the entire territory, in keeping with Indigenous West Papuan preferences.

² It was revealed, however, in documents later declassified, that at the time Australia was reluctant to intervene and ruffle Indonesia’s feathers, and only supported the peace enforcement mission, the urgency of which was impressed upon Indonesia by the US, at the eleventh-hour (Barker 2019b; Daley 2019).

³ Although this may prove difficult where such figures remain in positions of political power—for example, former commander of the TNI, Wiranto, who has been accused of crimes against humanity in East Timor, is now the security minister under the Widodo presidency.