



Country Report: West Papua September 2022

In 1963, Indonesia invaded West Papua, the western half of the island of New Guinea. Both countries were once colonized by the Netherlands. The United States [brokered a deal](#) with the Dutch and the UN to hand over West Papua to Indonesia. This deal was made due to Cold War politics and absent consultation with West Papuans. In 1969, Indonesia and the UN oversaw the rigged [Act of Free Choice](#) “referendum” in which 1000 selected “representatives” voted to formalize Indonesian rule. The “representatives” were threatened with death if they opposed annexation by Indonesia. West Papuans call the “referendum” the [“Act of No Choice.”](#)

West Papua is rich in natural resources. It is home to one of the biggest gold and copper mines in the world. The Grasberg mine, partly owned by American mining company [Freeport McMoRan](#), has caused grave environmental damage. Indonesian security forces respond with violence to any opposition to the mine’s operation and other “economic development” projects.

Due to migration from Java and other parts of Indonesia, [50% of the West Papuan population](#) is now non-Indigenous. Non-Papuans dominate the local economy and politics. Indonesia expropriates and exploits West Papuan land. Mining, deforestation, and internal colonization have led to West Papuans losing their land, traditional livelihoods, and autonomy.

There is strong support for the Free Papua Movement (OPM). However, support for West Papuan independence is [criminalized](#) under Indonesian law. The Indonesian government has designated the OPM and other separatists as [“terrorists,”](#) and has increased its military presence in West Papua.

Since 1969, the Indonesian military has committed genocide against West Papuans. It is estimated that the military has killed up to [500,000 West Papuans](#) since their war for independence began. The Indonesian army commits systematic [atrocities](#) against West Papuans that amount to genocide. They include massacres, torture, sexual assault, and detention of political prisoners.

In April 2021, the [West Papua Liberation Army](#) killed an Indonesian general. Between April and November 2021, Indonesian forces carried out systematic extrajudicial killings and torture. It forcibly displaced at least [5,000 West Papuans](#). The UN has reported that since 2018 the number of internally displaced Papuans has grown to [60,000 to 100,000 people](#).

The Indonesian government severely restricts journalists’ and human rights workers’ access to West Papua. In 2020, Indonesia passed a law to restrict internet services and to authorize arrests of journalists for publishing [“prohibited content.”](#) Indonesia controls the narrative of conflict in West Papua. It portrays separatists as criminal terrorists to justify its military’s genocidal campaign. The UN has reported that Indonesian authorities obstruct the delivery of [humanitarian aid](#) to displaced Papuans.

Indonesia’s abuse of human rights and its use of dehumanizing racist hate speech against West Papuans represent **Stage 3: Discrimination**, and **Stage 4: Dehumanization**. The Indonesian Army’s massacres, torture, sexual assault, forced displacement, and obstruction of humanitarian aid amounts to **Stage 9: Extermination**. Indonesia’s denial of access to West Papua to journalists and human rights groups constitutes **Stage 10: Denial**.

Genocide Watch Recommends:

- A UN Human Rights Council Independent Investigative Team should be allowed access to West Papua to investigate genocidal massacres, extrajudicial killings, torture, and other human rights abuses.
- The investigation should include the complicity of foreign corporations in these abuses.
- Indonesia should repeal its laws that authorize internet blackouts and that ban “prohibited content.”

- Indonesia should allow unrestricted access for journalists, human rights, and humanitarian aid workers.
- Indonesia should pass and enforce laws placing environmental restrictions on resource extraction.
- Indonesia should pass protection of property laws to prevent further dispossession of West Papuan land.