

Republic of Vanuatu



STATEMENT BY HON JOHNNY R KOANAPO

HEAD OF VANUATU DELEGATION TO THE 105th ACP MINISTERIAL SESSION

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Mr. President,
Excellencies,

I thank you for giving me the floor.

Mr. President, I wish to commend the Chairman of the Committee of Ambassadors for submitting his report to the Council for consideration and decision.

But permit me Mr. President to bring to our attention also an issue which had been brought by the Vanuatu delegation at the Committee of Ambassadors meeting and following procedural considerations, the issue itself notably, is not included in this report. And it is the issue of the pressing plight of West Papua.

Mr. President and I make this intervention on behalf of seven other Pacific Island nations including Vanuatu, Tonga, Tuvalu, Palau, Nauru, the Solomon Islands and the Marshall Islands also known as the Pacific Coalition on West Papua.

We have come here today in this council to amplify the serious concerns for human rights in West Papua in order to assist in providing some enlightenment to the Political Affairs Committee as well as the Committee of Ambassadors. We are very concerned indeed about the manner in which the international community had neglected the voices of the Papuan people over the last 50 years and consequently the Papuan people, their human rights have been trampled upon and severely suppressed since 1969.

Mr. President, you are presiding over this noble organisation and we have been debating the role which the ACP can play in international governance. There is no doubt that the ACP has made significant contributions to many international policies and in particular in the area of trade and socio economic progress in many countries particularly within our own regions. This organisation has contributed to numerous important projects and programs that have contributed to changing the economic landscape in most of our countries in terms of trade. And I think we have built a reputation that is credible and is recognised by many international organisations in the multilateral front.

Our role as ACP is not only to express our views on different political developments affecting our global citizens, but it is also to defend the important principles underpinning global governance, the rule of international law, human rights etc. I sincerely believe that the ACP has an important role in Global Governance and this role should complement the functions of organisations like

the United Nations and the Commonwealth including various regional and sub-regional organisations.

This includes oversight in promoting and defending the fundamental rights of all human beings. In the case of West Papua, we ACP as a global player on the multilateral front, we cannot close our eyes especially when our very own citizens are being neglected. What do we do when the rights of the Melanesian people of West Papua is challenged with military interventions and presence? Since the controversial Act of Free Choice in 1969, the Melanesian People of West Papua have been subject to on-going human rights violations committed by the Indonesian security services. The world has witnessed the litany of tortures, murders, exploitation, rapes, military raids, arbitrary arrests and dividing of civil society through intelligence operations and immigration policies. The Indonesian National Commission on Human Rights (KOMNAS HAM) concluded that these acts constitute crimes against humanity under Indonesian Law No. 26/2000 (KOMNAS HAM 2001,2004). In this climate of fear and repression of political dissent, and blatant negligence by the international Community including the UN and the powerful developed countries since 1969, we find this forgotten race still fighting for equality and justice. Yet the democratic nations have kept silent.

Mr. President, as a Melanesian citizen of the Pacific, we the seven countries have come here to sensitize the council for the first time. Injustice in West Papua is a threat to the principle of justice everywhere in the world. I quote the words of one of our previous Prime Ministers, and I quote, "I do not sleep well at night when I know that in 2010 Yawan Wayeni, known as a separatist was videotaped by the security forces as he was lying in a pool of his own blood with his intestines seeping from a gaping wound in his abdomen. It concerns me that in October 2010 Telenga Gire and Anggen Pugu Kiwo were tied by the military and were severely tortured. It concerns me when I see the video footage of a group of Papuan men bounded and being kicked in the head by uniformed soldiers who are meant to protect them. I am worried because between October of 2011 and March 2013, 25 Papuans were murdered and nothing has been done to bring perpetrators to justice. And it embarrasses me. As a Melanesian, to note that roughly 10-25 % of the indigenous Melanesian population have been killed by the Indonesian Security forces since 1963. While I acknowledge the 15 years of reformation that has taken place, I am also worried that Melanesians will soon become a minority in their own motherland of Papua." Unquote.

Those deaths and all the associated acts – the violent arrests of non-violent protestors, the beatings, torture, disappearances, extra-judicial executions, rape, intimidation of the local Papuan media, the barring of foreign media from the territory – have continued through the 20 years of democracy.

As the honourable ambassadors and others who have been here, and as I hope you are all aware, a month ago we also made available here in English and French, a packet of one hundred and twenty pages of information about West Papua for each member state and others, on some of these brutal acts affecting the Papuans today. We also distributed at that time USB drives for each member state with hundreds more pages and documentary films. Additionally we set up a dedicated website with even more information for all ACP member states to access.

Mr. President, Excellencies,

It is hard for me to say this any stronger: The West Papuans are Melanesian citizens who are being slowly but surely wiped out by the colonial masters and the ensuing apartheid-like colonial rule of these past 50-plus years. And we the governments of the world have stood by, are standing by, eyes turned away either in ignorance or otherwise occupied, while it happens.

But military rule in West Papua never ended. And year-by-year it increases. Relative to the indigenous Papuans, there are six times more military in the territory than anywhere in Indonesia. And they are not there to prevent some imagined invasion by anyone. They are there to maintain a brutal colonial regime that the West Papuans have refused to bow to. Because of this colonial occupation, West Papua remains a conflict zone, a zone of intense conflict up to this very day.

We have come here today, as we have come to the ACP these past two months for several reasons, to seek help for these voiceless people.

Mr. President,

We have come here for several reasons. First, we come here because it was many among you, some three dozen of you newly independent African and Caribbean countries, who stood with West Papua when others at the United Nations sought to push through Indonesia's illegal annexation and the fake referendum they held among only 1000 people out of a population of 800,000. You are the oldest defenders of West Papua's right to self-determination. You stood with West Papua when we in the Pacific had no political voice at that time because we were still colonies ourselves. You spoke of your solidarity with the – quote-unquote –

“Negro Papuans” and of your anger at how they were being passed from one colonizer to another. Denied their inalienable right to decide their own future. History is a witness to these records. We also take heart in the knowledge that it was the African and Caribbean and Pacific states who were the most consistent in their support of the struggle against South African Apartheid, which was also described as a crime against humanity, and another example of an African people being passed from one colonizer to another. (from the British to the Afrikaners)

The seven Pacific island nations, therefore, see the ACP as the right place to begin the process of ending what is another version of Apartheid and also among the longest political conflicts in the world.

President,

Secondly, we have come here to the ACP because the Europeans, Americans and today’s other Great Powers are unwilling to allow productive discussion of either the crimes against humanity perpetrated against West Papuans or the underlying denial of West Papua’s right to self-determination. That right to self-determination comes through the basic UN Covenants and by the bilateral treaty of 1962 that provisionally handed authority over West Papua from The Netherlands to Indonesia, from one colonizer to another.

For decades, during both Indonesian dictatorship and under Indonesian democracy, there have been innumerable reports decrying the human rights violations in West Papua. These have come from United Nations agencies and from its many Special Rapporteurs reports. These have come also from human rights organization within Indonesia and from other religious bodies.

Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of members have expressed the need to take a stand beyond the issue of gross human rights violations. They have agreed that any stand must make the connection between the human rights violations, and the slow-motion genocide of West Papuans and the underlying lack of political self-determination. This clear support was expressed when the issue was first tabled at the political subcommittee on March 27. It was expressed a second time at the Committee of Ambassadors on April 13 and once again back in the political subcommittee on April 19.

We therefore have now come to the Council of Ministers, this august body, and we ask for your support on this issue. This issue was taken to the ACP not to be killed at any committee level, but rather it should be guided and where possible a resolution should be drafted and adopted at the end of the process.

Mr. President,

We have nothing to gain by again and again speaking out on behalf of West Papua. True, we are Pacific Islanders, we are Melanesians and we feel a common identity. True, for Vanuatu, we too were colonized. We endured colonisation of over 74 years. We knew what it meant to be landowners but your land is taken from you. We experienced the stealing of our resources and poisoning of our people so the local tribes could be wiped out so their colonisers could take over our land. These are the challenging realities we had gone through. These are the challenges countries like Timor Leste in our region went through, but they found the support of countries around this table. Today they are sitting with us around this table and they have a voice. But the West Papuans are still crying out. We must bear the same moral burden to address the plight of this Pacific citizens.

It is incumbent on us as human beings and as nations that have all lived under racist colonial rule to speak up. It is incumbent on us if we seek, as I think we do, to establish the ACP and – I quote the Georgetown preamble and other of our guiding documents – “to become a global player on issues of importance.” If we seek, as we have said we do, to take up serious issues, grave issues, universal issues.

I conclude, Excellencies, with utmost urgency: I call on this body to follow due processes and pass a resolution to address the plight of West Papuans. I call on this body to establish a fact finding mission to West Papua and get their views of the people on the ground on human rights and self-determination. We ask that a draft resolution on this matter is prepared for the council’s consideration at the next council sitting.

God Bless West Papua, God Bless the ACP.