

# Australian-funded military accused of murder in West Papua

Wednesday 20 June 2012, by [BALOWSKI James](#) (Date first published: 17 June 2012).

Riots erupted in the West Papuan provincial capital of Jayapura on June 14 after a leading pro-independence activist was shot dead during an arrest reportedly led by members of the Australian-funded counter-terrorism unit Detachment 88.

National police spokesperson Muhammad Taufik said that Mako Tabuni, the secretary-general of the West Papua National Committee (KNPB), was shot dead in the town of Waena, near Jayapura. "He was armed. Police asked him to surrender but he didn't. Police shot at him, hitting his hip and leg. He died on the way to hospital", he told reporters.

News of the killing brought people out onto the streets of Jayapura, torching shops and vehicles. Television footage showed burned buildings and smouldering cars, and security forces were reportedly deployed with orders to shoot on sight. AP reported that mobs stabbed an onlooker to death, injured four others and burned five shops, four cars and more than 20 motorbikes.

In a press release, the national police said that they opened fire after Tabuni took a firearm belonging to one of the officers and tried to escape when police approached to arrest him. National police chief General Timur Pradopo told the June 14 Post that Tabuni was involved in recent shooting and arson attacks. Police also alleged that Tabuni was involved in a June 5 shooting in Entrop, near Jayapura, resulting in the death of a soldier.

Human rights activist Markus Haluk told Reuters that he doubted the police version of events. "This is not law enforcement; this is ridiculous. Security forces are using the excuse of law enforcement to shoot, using the classic excuse of the separatist group stigma."

Quoting sources in Jayapura, West Papua Media (WPM) reported that Tabuni was shot by heavily armed police as they stormed an area outside student dormitories at the Cenderawasih University in Abepura. A senior KNPB member told WPM that friends heard gunshots and saw a white Avanza car drive up and ambush Tabuni, who was shot at least six times, according to witnesses. WPM said that it has confirmed independently that Detachment 88 troops were in command of the raid.

Human rights activists slammed police for the killing. "Even if he resisted arrest and tried to escape, police should not have shot him to death. As far as we know the KNPB is not an armed group", National Human Rights Commission chairperson Ihdhal Kasim told AFP on June 15. KNPB spokesperson Warpo Wetipo said that, according to witnesses, Tabuni was unarmed and police kept shooting at him even after he was down.

## Mysterious shootings

Tabuni had been campaigning for an investigation into mysterious shootings over the last month that have left at least 16 people dead. The latest wave of violence began on May 29 when German-born Pieter Dietmar Helmut was shot at a popular beach in Jayapura. Although multiple witnesses identified the car from which a Papuan man shot Helmut, no arrests have been made.

On the same day a primary school teacher was shot dead in the highland town of Mulia in Puncak Jaya. Witnesses said that he was serving customers at a kiosk next to his house when one of the customers suddenly shot him in the head.

Four days later, activists from the KNPB held a protest in Jayapura over the shootings. According to witnesses, police opened fire, killing Yesaya Mirin and wounding five others. At a second demonstration in Abepura on June 7, KNPB leader Buchtar Tabuni was arrested along with another activist as he got off a bus.

“The men were arrested in relation with anarchic protests”, national police spokesperson Boy Rafli Amar told AFP on June 10. Amar said the KNPB is suspected of organising protests in recent months that have badly vandalised shops, public facilities and a university campus in several Papuan cities. The KNPB denies any violence and said on its web site that the police are using the group as a “scapegoat”. Tabuni was released from prison last year after being jailed in 2008 for organising support for the International Parliamentarians for West Papua, a pro-independence pressure group of international lawmakers.

On June 3, a university student was stabbed to death by unidentified attackers. A day later a high school student was shot in the back by unidentified assailants on a motorcycle. On June 6 a civil servant from the Cenderawasih military command was shot dead by an unknown attacker in front of the Jayapura mayor’s office. On June 7 five more people were killed in separate incidents. One was a KNPB activist shot dead by police in Jayapura. Police initially claimed he died from injuries sustained in a fall while trying to escape arrest. However, after a bullet was removed from the victim’s head, Jayapura police chief Alfred Papare admitted that a police officer had shot the victim.

On June 10 and 11, two more people were shot dead, one outside a shopping mall and the second close to Cenderawasih University.

The shootings escalated only days after the Indonesian government claimed that “Papua is stable” during the UN Human Rights Council’s quadrennial human rights review on May 23. Diplomats in the review session inquired about human rights violations in Papua and the government’s commitment to releasing Papuan political prisoners such as Filep Karma, who was jailed for 15 years for flying the Morning Star flag, the outlawed symbol of the Papuan separatist movement.

## **Murderous rampage**

On June 6, an angry crowd stabbed a soldier to death and seriously injured another after their motorbike ran over a three-year-old Papuan child in Honai Lama district in the Central Highlands city of Wamena. In retaliation, hundreds of soldiers from the 756<sup>th</sup> Battalion swept through Honai Lama and elsewhere in Wamena, beating and stabbing residents, burning homes and killing livestock. The soldiers set fire to numerous buildings and motor vehicles, causing villagers to flee into the surrounding forest. According to the Papua office of the Institute for Policy Research and Advocacy, 10 villagers were killed during the attack and dozens injured.

Video clips on the WPM web site from sources in West Papua show the destruction. Local independent human rights activist Roni Lokbere told WPM that soldiers were firing indiscriminately. “Anyone in sight of police and soldiers who have the black and curly hair, it is not forgiving — just automatic firing action”, Lokbere said in a message with the videos sent to WPM.

A military [TNI] spokesperson in Jayapura initially denied that soldiers had injured any Papuans, but President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono later conceded that soldiers had “overreacted” in their handling of the incident. TNI commander Admiral Agus Suhartono referred to the attack as

retaliation for the killing of a soldier. He added that the TNI had come to an agreement to build tents as temporary shelters for some villagers who lost their houses and that the TNI soldiers involved would be “questioned”.

### **Military sweeps**

There have also been reports of military operations on the isolated island of Yapen off the north coast of West Papua. On June 8 WPM quoted sources in Yapen as saying that major security sweeps and blockades were taking place in villages that are home to non-violent political activists.

A senior police officer in the Yapen town of Serui told West Papuan activists that 140 Kopassus elite Special Forces personnel had been deployed from Jayapura, with two more companies of paramilitary police to be sent from Biak, reinforcing a significant build-up of military strength since April.

WPM said that the Angkaisera district east of Serui has been subject to an ongoing blockade and raids by security forces since June 7, causing thousands of civilians to seek refuge in the jungle without food. It was also reported that political activists have been issued summonses to report to local police.

WPM said that raids were also conducted across Angkaisera district by joint forces of the TNI, police and Detachment 88, together with Kopassus and Kostrad Strategic Reserve commandos from the Pattimura division based in Maluku, the Hassanudin divisions from Makassar and the Siliwangi division from West Java, which have been deployed to Yapen.

In response to the shootings, on June 8 National Intelligence Agency chief Lieutenant General Marciano Norman said security sweeps for people in possession of firearms would be conducted to prevent further attacks. Norman said that the shootings were being carried out by the Free Papua Movement (OPM), who had begun to enter the town from the mountains. Speaking to reporters on June 11, Marciano claimed that the OPM were seeking “to attract empathy from the international community to support their movement”.

### **‘Foreign hands’ at play?**

Responding to speculation about the involvement of security forces in the recent killings, Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle legislator Tubagus Hasanuddin blamed unnamed foreign parties. “I think there’s a possibility of a foreign hand playing around in Papua”, he said at a news conference in Jakarta on July 10. “... it’s clear that these shootings have been organised very carefully and systematically, and the targets chosen for a reason. These attacks have been well planned and funded.”

Hasanuddin spoke two days after a delegation of legislators arrived in Papua to assess the situation. The legislators also met with members of the provincial chapter of the Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI), who claimed they were being targeted and could not speak freely about what they knew. “There are many things we would have liked to tell the legislators, but we can’t because we need more protection”, AJI Papua chairperson Victor Mambor was quoted as saying by the Globe on June 9. Mambor claimed that intelligence agents from the police and military had infiltrated many local news organisations, and that journalists in Papua were increasingly threatened, beaten, tortured and even murdered.

On June 10 police said they had arrested three people connected with the attacks. Papuan deputy police chief Brigadier General Paulus Waterpauw told the Post by telephone that the three were perpetrators in “the recent assaults”, and that the attacks were all connected.

Mahfudz Siddiq, one of the legislators who visited West Papua, told the Post: "The Papua military commander, the Papua police deputy chief and intelligence officers all told us that armed groups had orchestrated the attacks, as the OPM's anniversary, which falls on July 1, was drawing near". Siddiq claimed that the groups had arranged the attacks to disrupt a planned visit by President Yudhoyono on July 3.

## **Questions**

Legislators, activists and academics have questioned the government's failure to arrest any perpetrators after more than 30 shootings over the past year. House Speaker Marzuki Alie, from Yudhoyono's ruling Democrat Party, alleged that some people were orchestrating the bloodshed in order to grab power and get access to the province's abundant natural resources. "Some have used the chaotic condition there to benefit themselves", he told the Globe on June 10, adding that he did not rule out soldiers and local officials being involved.

Aleksius Jemadu, dean of Pelita Harapan University's School of Social and Political Sciences, said he suspected that the authorities' inability to solve any of the cases was due to the involvement of security officers in the incidents. "These incidents show that Jakarta has failed to address the problems in the province. The shootings indicate that the local officers don't listen to the central government", he told the Globe.

A Papuan caucus in the House of Representatives also demanded that the TNI and government put an end to the violence and that the government investigate the shooting spree by soldiers in Wamena.

## **Yudhoyono the 'main problem'**

Democratic Party of Struggle lawmaker Eva Kusuma Sundari was quoted by the Globe on July 11 as saying, "The problem has been identified, possible solutions have been recommended, but the president stays still. The main problem is with the president."

A few days later Yudhoyono downplayed the escalating violence. "The recent incidents in Papua can be considered small scale, with a limited number of casualties" and were "minor if we compare them to the violence in the Middle East", he said during a cabinet meeting on June 12. Papuans were understandably angered. Activist John Djonga said the statement reflected Yudhoyono's lack of commitment to human rights. "It's really sad for the president to disrespect all the victims of recent shootings. Violence is still painful regardless of how many victims there are.", Djonga told the June 13 Jakarta Post.

Human rights groups say that both the police and the TNI have an interest in creating and maintaining conflict to justify their presence and to protect lucrative legal and illegal business interests. "In all the shootings, the perpetrators did not take the victims' belongings, such as their money or valuable goods", Poengky Indarti, the executive director of human rights watchdog Imparsial, told a press conference on June 7. Indarti said that most of the victims were shot in vital spots, indicating that their assailants were trained marksmen.

## **Solidarity actions**

In a letter on June 8, the Sydney Australia West Papua Association called on Australian foreign minister Bob Carr to urge Yudhoyono to control the security forces in West Papua and return them to their barracks to avoid further escalation.

On June 13, Humanitarian Solidarity for Papua — made up of National Papua Solidarity, the Papuan

Student Alliance, the Papuan Traditional Social Community Against Corruption, the Papuan NGO Forum for Cooperation, the Commission for Missing Persons and Victims of Violence, the Indonesian Forum for the Environment, the Legal Aid Institute, the Student Struggle Center for National Liberation and the Democratic Volunteers — held a rally at the offices of the coordinating minister for politics, law and security affairs in Jakarta. The protesters called on the government to investigate the shootings fully and to withdraw troops from West Papua. The group condemned Yudhoyono's remarks downplaying the violence and his claims that separatists are behind the recent attacks, saying that the real causes of problems in Papua are economic injustice, military operations and the unresolved problem of West Papua's integration into Indonesia.

Protesters from the Labour Joint Secretariat — an alliance of trade unions and labour activists — rallied at the Hotel Indonesia traffic circle in Central Jakarta on June 15 condemning the violence, murders and human rights violations in West Papua.

A rally in Melbourne on May 15 at the Indonesian consulate, organised by the Australian West Papua Association Melbourne, condemned the violence, saying taxes are contributing to thousands of deaths in West Papua and calling on the Australian people and government to take a stand for freedom of expression and self-determination for West Papua.

**James Balowski**, in Jakarta

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*A petition campaign has also been launched by the UK-based Free West Papua Campaign calling on President Yudhoyono to stop the military offensive in West Papua.*

<http://www.change.org/petitions/president-of-indonesia-stop-the-military-offences-against-west-papua>  
[ans](#)

*For the latest news and information on West Papua, visit Asia-Pacific Solidarity.*

<http://www.asia-pacific-solidarity.net/>

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\* From Direct Action — June 17, 2012

[http://directaction.org.au/australian\\_funded\\_military\\_accused\\_of\\_murder\\_in\\_west\\_papua](http://directaction.org.au/australian_funded_military_accused_of_murder_in_west_papua)