

Indonesia denies trying to bribe RNZ journalist over West Papua coverage

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The Indonesian Foreign Affairs Ministry has spoken out over allegations that the Indonesian delegation at the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Leaders Summit in Port Vila tried to bribe and intimidate a Radio New Zealand (RNZ) journalist in late August.

Foreign Affairs Ministry Asia-Pacific Director General Abdul Kadir Jailani explained that the Indonesian delegation has never used such an approach towards journalists. "Bribery has never been a policy or approach with journalists", said Jailani on Wednesday September 6 when sought for confirmation over the incident by CNN Indonesia. Jailani then said, "We do not have any interest in following or carrying out intimidation against journalists". According to a Radio New Zealand (RNZ) report, the alleged bribery attempt and intimidation began when one of its journalists, Kelvin Anthony, was covering the MSG Leaders Summit on August 23-24. An Indonesian official who appeared to be part of the Indonesian delegation at the MSG Summit, Ardi Nuswantoro, offered Anthony a special interview with Indonesia's Ambassador to Australia, Siswo Pramono. The interview offer came up after Nuswantoro informed Anthony several days earlier that the Indonesian government did not like RNZ's reporting on the Papua issue. After communicating directly and online, Nuswantoro asked Anthony to come to the Holiday Inn Resort on August 23 at 12 noon to interview Pramono. The alleged bribe attempt took place at around 1-1.10 pm local time after the interview had finished. "I was offered an exclusive interview with the Indonesian Ambassador to Australia at the MSG meeting after earlier being informed by Ardi Nuswantoro that his government did not like what RNZ has been broadcasting related to West Papua and said that it (the reports) were unbalanced", said Anthony as quoted by RNZ. Anthony then informed the Indonesian delegation that RNZ endeavours to make every effort to take a balanced and fair position in its reporting on the Papua issue. "We want to side with Indonesia too. However, we need the opportunity to speak openly (can be quoted and reported)", he said. Alleged bribery attempt During the interview, Anthony raised a series of questions including human rights issues in West Papua, the MSG meeting and the Indonesian government's focus in the Pacific. The interview lasted for more than 40 minutes. "I thought I had an exclusive interview that went well for a strong story out of the meeting that touched sensitive but pertinent issues involving Indonesia, the West Papua issue, and the Pacific", he said. After the interview, Anthony related how he was escorted out of the reception area and accompanied by at least three Indonesian officials. Nuswantoro then asked Anthony how he was getting home and if he had a car. As they walked to parking lot, the same official followed Anthony. "And when we about to approach the car, he said, 'The Indonesian delegation would like to offer you token of appreciation'." "I asked him, 'What's that?' He replied, 'A small gift'. I asked him again, 'But what is it?' He replied 'money'", said Anthony relating the incident as quoted by RNZ. Anthony was shocked and refused the money because it could compromise the story and his credibility as a journalist. The Indonesian official then withdrew and apologised for offering money. As result to the incident RNZ chose at the time not to air the interview with Ambassador Pramono. Alleged intimidation Anthony again met the Indonesian officials who had earlier offered money on August 24, the last day of the MSG Summit. He said the same officials continued following him everywhere and they also send a video clip showing Papuan indigenous people committed violence. "I feel a little intimidated but I tried to stay

near local journalists as much as possible so that I can avoid Indonesian officials approaching me”, he said.

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