

# **Papua: Rights watchdog says military operations in Papua causing fear, massive displacement**

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**Jayapura – Indonesian Human Rights Watch (Imparsial) says that military operations in the land of Papua only sacrifice civilians and create massive internal displacement.**

According to Imparsial, large numbers of civilians from the villages of Bumbakon, Mimin, Oksop, Alutbakon, Oktumi, Atenor and Ngangom in Oksop district, in Star Highlands regency, Papua Highlands Province, have left their homes and been forced to flee into the forests and other districts since December 8.

The refugees are reportedly having difficulty obtaining food and drinking water supplies. The wave of internally displaced people was caused by residents feeling afraid due to military operations following a sudden mobilisation of military personnel on December 4.

“This (military operation) were surprising and caused anxiety among residents in Oksop district, who felt disturbed by the presence of large numbers of security personnel in their area”, Imparsial Director Ardi Manto Adiputra was quoted as saying in a press release sent to Jubi in Jayapura, Papua, on Wednesday December 18.

This was particularly so, continued Adiputra, for women and children who have never heard the sound of gunfire around their village.

Imparsial is of the view that military operations which involve sweeps by the TNI (Indonesian Military) have been conducted inhumanely and failed to heed the principles of humanitarian law.

“They fired shots indiscriminately and carried out inspections in a manner that was intimidating and violent”, he said.

According to Adiputra, the sudden presence of large numbers of TNI soldiers in Oksop district caused residents to be afraid and forced them to seek refuge in the forest to save themselves.

“This incident has caused a deep trauma for civilians who are victims of military operations that are carried out arbitrarily”, he said.

Adiputra said that according to a report by Reverend Jimmy Koirewoa, the head of the Evangelical Church of Indonesia’s (GIDI) department of law and human rights, around 3,318 people from Oksop district are currently living in refugee camps.

The refugees are scattered across several access points to refugee camps and the GIDI’s Efesus Sape Church building is under the control of the TNI. The mobilisation of TNI troops, he continued, was carried out by land and air, and by dropping troops from helicopters.

“As a result of these incidents, all facilities and public services for residents are totally paralysed, access to schools and health services is hampered”, he said.

In addition to this, he said, on December 4 the Bumbakon Bethlehem Catholic diocese congregation stables were targeted by the TNI who were pursuing a West Papua National Liberation Army (TPNPB) group. The congregation’s homes were broken into causing fear and mass evacuations.

According to Imparsial, the deployment of TNI troops in Papua is continuing and throughout 2024 the government has sent at least 3,187 non-organic troops to the land of Papua.

“It is important to remember that the deployment of these troops is an illegal act that is contrary to Article 7 Paragraph (3) of the TNI Law which asserts that military operations other than war can only be carried out after there is a policy and political decision by the state, namely a government political policy together with the DPR [House of Representatives] that is formulated through the mechanism of a working relationship between the government and the DPR such as consultation and working meetings”, said Adiputra.

“Whereas so far there has not been one political policy or decision to conduct military operations by the TNI in the land of Papua. As a result, people continue to fall victim because armed contacts often occur in the middle of residential areas”, he said.

Imparsial believes that the illegal deployment of troops and military operations, which continue to be carried out by the government, increasingly show that the government is not serious about resolving the conflict in Papua.

The security approach is still a top priority for the government. Conversely, a peaceful approach and dialogue tends to be ignored.

“Security measures and approaches actually worsen the situation, they add to local communities’ fears and strengthen the military’s influence in areas that are vulnerable to conflict”, he said.

Moreover, he said, the massive deployment of TNI troops will only continue to increase civilians casualties. “If this continues, this cycle [of violence] will continue to be repeated and develop into a humanitarian crisis in the land of Papua”, he said.

Furthermore, he said, this is very unfortunate bearing in mind that Catholic and Protestant congregations will soon be celebrating Christmas. “However, this time round people in Oksop district cannot feel the happiness of welcoming Christmas in their respective homes as in previous years”, he said.

In this context, according to Adiputra, security forces who are supposed to be tasked with providing security and comfort for their citizens, have actually become a source of fear. Even though Oksop residents still hope that this year’s Christmas celebrations can be held peacefully.

On the basis of the above, impartial condemns the sudden military operations being carried out by the TNI in Oksop district that have created fear among civilians.

Imparsial is urging the government to immediately withdraw all non-organic troops and stop the illegal military operations on the basis of maintaining security in Papuan. Because the lack of clarity over the mechanisms for mobilising troops in Papua is not in accordance with Law Number 34/2004 on the TNI.

Imparsial is also urging the National Human Rights Commission (Komnas HAM) to conduct a

thorough investigation into the military operations in Oksop district which has resulted in a massive wave of internally displaced people.

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Translated by James Balowski