

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PUBLIC STATEMENT

Index: ASA 21/1575/2015
4 May 2015

Indonesia: Allow foreign journalists and NGOs access to Papua

Amnesty International calls on the Indonesian government to take immediate steps to ensure free and unimpeded access to the provinces of Papua and West Papua for foreign journalists, international human rights non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other independent observers to report on human rights violations as promised by President Joko Widodo in June 2014 during his presidential campaign.

Restrictions on access for foreign journalists and international human rights NGOs to Papua have been in place for many years, including for Amnesty International. The denial of access to these provinces limits independent reporting of the human rights situation there. It also contributes to the climate of impunity in a region where there have been consistent reports of torture and other ill-treatment; unnecessary and excessive use of force and firearms and unlawful killings by security forces.

Human rights defenders and political activists are at particular risk of human rights violations.

President Joko Widodo (Jokowi) came into office in October 2014 with commitments to respect and protect human rights in Indonesia and to improve the situation in Papua. During his presidential campaign, Jokowi visited the Papuan region three times and promised to open up Papua for foreign journalists and international organizations, if he was elected president.

However, over the last six months, the situation on the ground in Papua has not changed and allegations of human rights violations continue to be reported. In December 2014, four students were shot dead and dozens injured when security forces opened fire on a peaceful protest in Paniai, Papua. In March 2015, four students, three of them children, were arbitrarily detained and tortured or otherwise ill-treated by police in Abepura. In April, five Papuan political activists were arbitrarily detained and charged with “rebellion” by police after meeting and discussing the political situation in Papua with the Minister of Defence in Jakarta.

Amnesty International believes that opening up Papua to international observers will send a powerful signal to the international community that President Widodo’s administration has nothing to hide and will contribute to increasing transparency, accountability and the protection of human rights in the region.

The authorities should also release all prisoners of conscience in Papua and elsewhere in Indonesia as well as amend or repeal provisions on “rebellion” in the Criminal Code that have been used to imprison dozens of political activists for up to 15 years for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression, including for raising or waving pro-independence flags.

Amnesty International takes no position on the political status of any province of Indonesia, including calls for independence. However, the organization believes that the right to freedom of expression includes the right to peacefully advocate referendums, independence or other political solutions.

Amnesty International is supporting an initiative led by UK-based NGO TAPOL to call on the Indonesian authorities to ensure free and unimpeded access to foreign journalists, international human rights organizations and other international observers to the provinces of Papua and West Papua where

there are systematic human rights violations taking place. There were demonstrations and other activities taking place this week in the UK and various other countries.