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Indonesia: Investigate Police Shooting of Peaceful Papuan Protester

The Indonesian government should ensure proper accountability for the death of a peaceful protester apparently killed by a bullet fired by police in the country's restive region of Papua, Amnesty International said.

Opinus Tabuni, which media reports identify as between 35 and 41, was part of a crowd celebrating World Indigenous Day on 9 August. Police used live ammunition to fire warning shots after some members of the crowd raised the banned "Morning Star" flag, regarded by Indonesian authorities as a symbol of the Papuan separatist movement.

According to media reports, after police fired the shots and attempted to remove the flag, Opinus Tabuni was discovered dead by members of the crowd with a bullet wound clearly visible to his chest.

"Indonesian authorities must ensure a prompt, impartial, independent and transparent investigation to determine how it is that a peaceful protester was shot to death. The investigators should publicize the results of forensic tests, including an autopsy if it is performed," said Sam Zarifi, Amnesty International's Asia-Pacific director. "This incident highlights the heavy hand with which Indonesian authorities use in dealing with the people of Papua."

Amnesty International called on the investigation to look into whether police forces violated international law and standards such as the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials and the Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials, which provide that law enforcement officials should apply non-violent means in carrying out their duties and only use force as a last resort, when strictly necessary.

"Police forces facing protesters must be trained and equipped to respond with non-lethal measures to the extent possible; the use of firearms is inherently dangerous," Sam Zarifi added. "Those responsible for Opinus Tabuni's death should be held accountable and the government must ensure his family and dependents receive adequate reparations for their loss".

Background

Papua, Indonesia's eastern-most province, has witnessed a deteriorating human rights situation over the past few years. The indigenous population, ethnically distinct from other parts of Indonesia, has increasingly questioned the Indonesian government's policies regarding Papua's natural resources and the migration of non-Papuans into the area. The Indonesian government maintains a heavy police and military presence, whose members are accused of repeatedly intimidating and threatening members of the local indigenous community who support greater autonomy or independence from Indonesia through peaceful means. Attacks are increasingly targeted against human rights activists and church leaders. Amnesty International recognises the numerous Papuans convicted or awaiting trial for displaying the banned "Morning Star" flag in a peaceful manner as Prisoners of Conscience.

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