

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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Indonesia: Amnesty International welcomes release of Papuan students in Manokwari

Amnesty International welcomes the decision of the Manokwari District Court on 27 September 2011 to acquit four of the five students arrested in Manokwari, West Papua province, for their involvement in a peaceful protest. The organization hopes that the court's decision is an indication of greater respect for freedom of expression and peaceful assembly in the province and calls on the Indonesian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release all other prisoners of conscience in Indonesia.

The students were arrested on 14 December 2010 with two other activists while taking part in a peaceful march and ceremony in Manokwari, West Papua province, protesting against injustice and human rights violations by the Indonesian security forces against Papuans. During the ceremony the "14 Star Flag", a symbol of West Melanesian independence, was raised.

Police then arrested seven people: Melkianus Bleskadit; Daniel Yenu, a priest; and five students – Jhon Wilson Wader, Penehas Serongon, Yance Sekenyap, Alex Duwiri and Jhon Raweyai. All seven were charged with "rebellion" under Article 106 of the Indonesian Criminal Code which carries a maximum sentence of life imprisonment, and with "incitement" under Article 160.

On 18 August 2011 the Manokwari District Court sentenced Melkianus Bleskadit to two years' imprisonment while Daniel Yenu was sentenced to seven months and 16 days' imprisonment on 23 August 2011 and has now been released. Four of the students were acquitted and released on 27 September 2011; however the fifth student, Jhon Raweyai, was found guilty of "rebellion" and sentenced to nine months and 17 days' imprisonment. He is due to be released soon as he has spent more than nine months in detention.

Amnesty International is aware of at least 90 political activists in the provinces of Papua and Maluku who have been imprisoned solely for their peaceful political activities. Amnesty International considers them to be prisoners of conscience, and calls for their immediate and unconditional release.

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Indonesia is a state party, and the Indonesian Constitution guarantee the rights to freedom of expression, opinion, association and peaceful assembly. While the Indonesian government has the duty and the right to maintain public order, it must ensure that any restrictions to freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly are no more than is permitted under international human rights law.

Amnesty International takes no position whatsoever 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 any other political solutions that do not involve incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence.