

We are all familiar with Indonesia's terrible record of human rights abuse in East Timor, a sorry tale of oppression, murder and torture. East Timor became something of a *cause celebre*, as the world woke up to the facts of Indonesia's illegal invasion, harsh occupation and, finally, the rights of its people to self-determination. What we more easily forget is that, while this murder and mayhem was being perpetrated by the Indonesian forces, the West, our own enlightened government and that of Australia included, had, for a generation or more, turned a blind eye to the atrocities. The East Timorese were on their own, presumably as the need to maintain friendly relations with a growing economic power overrode any concerns about justice and human rights. One could scarcely imagine a clearer case of injustice and the right of a people to self-determination, yet the plight of the Timorese was so easily forgotten.

That such hypocrisy and neglect of a people so close to us could occur again would be unconscionable, would it not? Of course it would but the *realpolitik* of international relations should not be underestimated. A very similar set of circumstances to those that occurred in East Timor do indeed prevail in a land even closer to ours, and a mere hop, skip and a jump from our Australian neighbours. West Papua, artificially divided from Papua New Guinea by its colonial legacy, has, and is, suffering just such a fate.

Ethnically and linguistically completely different from the other Indonesian populations, West Papua was granted independence but, in breach of an agreement with the Netherlands, the previous colonial master, Indonesia illegally invaded in the early 60s, an invasion, supposedly legitimised by a vote of 1000 or so tribal leaders under the gun. Indonesia has maintained a reign of terror carried out by its armed force since that time. From 1969, the Free Papua Movement, or OPM has conducted an armed resistance, albeit with the most meagre of military resources. This insurgency has been fuelled by economic deprivation, political disempowerment and the forcible loss of and pollution of habitat. Protest has been met with the most vicious response. Lowry, in his 'Armed Forces of Indonesia' cites the armed forces as "indulging in indiscriminate killing and torture of suspected rebels and sympathisers" and the "indiscriminate use of terror and force rather than the building of social structures and networks which would produce more enduring and self-sustaining results". Because of the control of information coming out of West Papua, estimates of deaths are difficult, but tens of thousands (the OPM estimates hundreds of thousands), of non-combatants have been killed by the army since the 1960's. The exact figure may not be known, but, recently, the BBC gave a figure of 15% of the population having been killed in the ongoing independence struggle. The Indonesian army's has an atrocious record of murder, rape and torture, the plight of the West Papuan people is all but ignored by the West and its press.

Of course, the usual suspects in the exploitation of the powerless, the multi-national mining and forestry concerns, are there as well, paying millions in protection to the army, whilst, in the case

of Freeport McMoran at its Grasberg mine for instance, earning about US\$ 1 million in profit per day. Needless to say, only a scrap of this finds its way to the local communities, whose protests are met with the most brutal response Freeport Mc Moran built the largest gold mine and the third largest copper mine in the world in West Papua. It became the largest tax payer to the Indonesian government and was vital to the governments drive to attract overseas investment in the post-Sukarno era. Its economic importance entailed the brutal suppression of any opposition to its activities . Mass killings of Papuans by the Indonesian forces have occurred near the mine and any call for a better deal for the local people has only ever been met with the stationing of more troops.

.People disappear, whole populations are forcibly moved, and denied the ability to pursue their traditional way of life, and the world stays silent. Having seen the hypocritical about-turn of our own and other governments over the situation in East Timor, one need not be surprised. The Indonesian maintains strict control over media access to West Papua, and its far enough off the beaten track for the Indonesian government and the multinationals to get on with business. Migration from other parts of Indonesia means that the West Papuans are threatened with becoming a minority in their own land with their land and resources being exploited for the gain of others, and their traditional way of life in danger of extinction.