

**Papuan priest Yohanes Jonga has been named the recipient of the 2009 Yap Thiam Hien Award, the country's most prestigious human rights accolade, for his fearless struggles in the troubled province, the organizing committee said.**

"The priest deserves to win the award because he has fearlessly fought for the rights of local people in Papua," Todung Mulya Lubis, one of the five judges, was quoted by detik.com as saying on Monday. "In fact, he has received repeated death threats and has several times been threatened with being buried alive," Todung said of the priest, who works in Keerom district.

Because of Jonga's dogged efforts in defense of the human rights of Papuans, he has been accused of being a sympathizer of the secessionist Free Papua Movement (OPM). He also has been given the nickname "women priest" for defending the rights of women in the area.

"[Despite all these threats and insults], he has continued fighting for local people's basic rights," Todung said, adding that Jonga had obviously gone above and beyond his duties as a priest.

Todung acknowledged that fighting for human rights in Papua was not an easy task. "Most people there lack education and women are powerless," he said.

Named after the late Chinese-Indonesian activist Yap Thiam Hien, the annual award is given out by the Human Rights Study Center Foundation to those who contribute to the advancement of human rights in the country.

Since its establishment in 1992, winners have come from a wide range of backgrounds including labor activists, rights groups, farmers and a journalist.

Last year's winner was Siti Musdah Mulia, an activist fighting for pluralism and the rights of women in Islam.

In addition to Todung, this year's panel of judges included legal expert Harkristuti Harkrisnowo, journalist Maria Hartiningsih, Ildal Kasim, the chairman of the National Commission on Human Rights, and activist Rahlan Nasidik. The award will be officially presented on Dec. 10 in Jakarta.

Todung also said the judges had selected the late Fauzi Abdullah, an activist who dedicated his life to fighting for labor rights, as recipient of the life-time achievement award.

"Fauzi played a significant role in developing the labor movement here," Todung said. "He was a typical human rights fighter. He shied away from media publicity and was a humble figure."