



Rights activists hold a banner outside the Indonesian embassy in Washington D.C. on Tuesday. (Photo: AFP)

Rights activists rallied Tuesday outside the Indonesian embassy in Washington D.C. demanding the immediate release of two Papuan activists on the fifth anniversary of their arrest for raising a separatist flag.

Filep Karma and Yusak Pakage were detained in late 2004 in the Papuan capital of Jayapura for displaying the Morning Star flag as part of a ceremony commemorating the 1962 declaration of Papuan independence. They were sentenced in 2005 to 15 and 10 years, respectively.

“The aim is to keep putting the pressure on the Indonesian government to remind them we have not forgotten these two prisoners,” Amnesty International regional director Folabi Olagbaju told AFP as he led the demonstration of some 40 protesters.

“It is outrageous that the (Indonesian) government can arrest and imprison people at a non-violent, peaceful protest for raising a flag... there needs to be freedom of expression, and they (the government) shouldn’t be afraid of that,” he said.

“These two should not have spent a day in prison, much less five years.”

Indonesian courts have handed down stiff penalties including life in prison to people caught with separatist symbols such as the Papuan flag.

More than 170 people are currently imprisoned in Indonesia for peacefully promoting separatism in Indonesia, most of them from Papua or the eastern Maluku islands, according to Human Rights Watch.

Indonesia took control of Papua, a former Dutch colony on the western half of New Guinea island, in 1969 after a vote among a select group of Papuans widely seen as a sham.

Papuans have long accused Indonesia's military of violating human rights in the province and complain that the bulk of earnings from its rich natural resources flow to Jakarta.

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