



**Father Johanes Djonga (*photo*) from Jayapura diocese in Papua province has received the 2009 Yap Thiam Hien Award for his fight for Papuans' rights. (UCA News)**

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The area that makes up Papua province today was declared independent from Dutch colonial rule in 1961. In 1963, Papua was put under United Nations stewardship. The territory was incorporated into Indonesia after a controversial UN-run referendum in 1969.

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**FULL □ INTERVIEW WITH FR JOHANES DJONGA:**

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The following is an interview with him:

**UCA NEWS: What does the award mean to you?**

FATHER JOHANES DJONGA: The award is not for me but for all of us whose conscience and commitment to humanity go beyond social boundaries. It is meant for people whose voices have never been heard, for those tortured and killed.

When we fight for human rights, we are no longer compartmentalized by race, ethnicity, religion or class. I represent colleagues, human rights defenders, victims, and the tribal people of Papua.

### **When did you start trying to help Papuans?**

I started in 1986 when I was a young catechist at St. Steven Church of Kimbim. There I learned about the situation of local people. I realized that being a leader here means solving people's social problems too. I began to see that a priest is not only a spiritual but also a social leader.

### **Can you describe human rights in Papua?**

The Papuans are crying for a just dialogue with the national government in Jakarta. Notably, the national government's Law Number 21/2001 on Special Autonomy for Papua province has failed to improve education, healthcare, and the local economy. Everywhere, there is discrimination and marginalization of Papuans.

(Editor's note: The law, ratified by then-president Megawati Soekarnoputri on Nov. 21, 2001, proposes empowering native Papuans in the civil, cultural, political and social spheres. It also states the need to redress inequalities and injustices in the province.)

There is no coordination between the national and local governments, which has caused disparity in the implementation of the Special Autonomy policy. It just indicates the government's lack of seriousness in developing Papua.

Many people are afraid of intimidation by the army.

Regarding women's rights in Papua, many Papuan women are raped and physically abused by

their husbands. So I founded the “Papuan Women’s Movement” for them.

### **Tell us about your struggles.**

Legal and human rights problems have existed for a long time in Papua. Everyone knows about past military operations here.

As of now, the arrest of human rights activists, students, and all who defend the rights of Papuans continues. Pictures of those arrested or investigated, including myself, are placed in intelligence files. Some will be labeled as belonging to the “Free Papua Movement,” or OPM, and will also be targeted under the pretext that the military is defending the unity of Indonesia.

The concept of peace in Papua does not merely mean no more war, but also positive efforts to develop Papua into a more humane and dignified society.

For this, I work with NGOs, Legal Aid (LBH) of Papua, the diocese of Jayapura, Kontras (Indonesian acronym for the Commission for the Disappeared and Victims of Violence) of Papua, Imparsial (an Indonesian human rights monitor) of Jakarta, and Franciscan Bishop Leo Laba Ladjar of Jayapura.

The Papuans and NGOs see me as “opening the door” to those isolated politically and economically.

### **What inspires you to do this?**

My involvement with advocacy groups such as LBH and Kontras, and my time at university. These experiences have shaped me and encouraged me to not only work for pastoral and spiritual issues but also social justice.

**What is the role of the local Church in your struggles?**

I used to be critical about the local diocese. But now things are much better because the Church has realized that my activities are purely for those oppressed.

I feel the call to make the unheard voices heard. I feel the need for Church leaders to build awareness among the faithful that faith issues are also social issues. Churches should come together and fight together.

**What will be your next move?**

I see opportunities to improve law enforcement and human rights. But it demands the cooperation of the government and NGOs.

Measures taken in future must prioritize respect for the existence of Papua's tribal people who have the same rights and dignity as other Indonesians.

Standing tall with the Papuans and those who respect laws and the rights of the Papuans is my privilege. In the future, I will continue to empower the women, and accompany Papuans in any legal process.

I encourage leaders of any religion, particularly my fellow Catholic priests, to continue supporting the struggle of the little ones.