

A CO-FOUNDER of the outlawed West Papuan independence movement, Nicolaas Jouwe, has returned to his homeland after more than 45 years in exile, calling for a new dialogue to resolve the separatist conflict in the resource-rich area.

But he pointedly declined to recognise Indonesian sovereignty over the territory.

Mr Jouwe's trip has been sponsored by the Indonesian Government. Ahead of his return from the Netherlands, Indonesia's ambassador to The Hague, Jusuf Effendy Habibie, hailed it as a breakthrough, saying Mr Jouwe would call on fighters from the Free Papua Movement (OPM) to "support the unity of Indonesia".

But Mr Jouwe did not renounce the independence movement and referred to Indonesia as a "neighbouring country".

"We need to have a dialogue with Indonesia because we are two nations that upheld our identity and kept it for so many years," he said

After meetings in Jakarta with political leaders, Mr Jouwe arrived in the West Papuan capital of Jayapura yesterday, accompanied by Indonesian officials.

Police prevented independence activists there to greet him from making contact and unfurling the Morning Star flag, the banned symbol of resistance that Mr Jouwe is credited with designing. Activists caught raising the flag face up to 10 years in prison.

The OPM, which Mr Jouwe co-founded, is also banned.

On Friday, Mr Jouwe met Indonesia's Welfare Minister Aburizal Bakrie, who signalled Jakarta's readiness to forge a new autonomy agreement with the region.

Shift to dialogue on West Papua

Geschreven door Tom Allard - The Age.com.au
maandag 23 maart 2009 01:00

West Papua — a former Dutch colony that was not part of Indonesia when it formed in 1949 — was handed to Jakarta in the 1960s in a move widely seen as an attempt by Western powers to curry favour with then president Sukarno, who was flirting with communism.

A United Nations sponsored referendum to confirm Indonesian sovereignty in 1969 was criticised as a sham because only 2000 hand-picked West Papuans cast their votes in a ballot that overwhelmingly endorsed Indonesian rule.

West Papua was granted special autonomy in 2001 but its development has been slow and living standards remain the lowest in the country, even though the region is blessed with valuable resources.

A belief that its wealth is being siphoned off by the central government has underpinned the grievances of indigenous Papuans. A policy of internal migration has also led to the region being swamped by Indonesians from across the archipelago, creating further resentment.

Tensions have been on the rise in Papua in recent months, with the poorly equipped military wing of the OPM having several skirmishes with the Indonesian military, including a raid that killed an Indonesia soldier a week ago. As a result, police last week offered a reward for the capture of Goliat Tabuni, the OPM's military commander.

Mr Tabuni, who has fled to the mountain jungles, released a statement calling for an "international political intervention" to resolve the conflict.

"I cannot give up," he said. "I will defend our land. I will continue the struggle until victory."