

Indonesia hails talks with Papuan rebel leader

Geschreven door Herald Tribune
vrijdag 20 maart 2009 01:00

JAKARTA, Indonesia: Indonesia hailed meetings with a rebel leader who returned to the country after more than 40 years in exile as a good first step toward negotiating an end to a decades-long insurgency in Papua province.

Nicholas Jouwe, 85, a co-founder of the Free Papua Movement, said Friday he came back at the government's invitation and was willing to discuss the rebel group's struggle for independence. He denied reports that the rebels were ready to give up.

"I've come to speak to the Indonesians face-to-face to see what we can do," Jouwe said. "We need each other. We are neighbors, eternal neighbors; they have to keep that in mind."

Welfare Minister Aburizal Bakrie said he was encouraged after talks with the man who is widely considered to be the ideological head of Papua's poorly armed separatist movement.

"It's a start," he said, adding that he hoped eventually for a deal like the one reached with rebels in westernmost Aceh province in 2005, which ended a 29-year insurgency that left more than 15,000 people dead.

After agreeing to lay down their arms, fighters there were given greater control over their mineral wealth and the right to take part in politics, which resulted in the election of a former rebel as governor.

Jouwe, who has been living in the Netherlands, will travel next to Papua.

Indonesia took over Papua from the Dutch in 1963 and formalized its sovereignty over the region six years later through a stage-managed vote by about 1,000 community leaders.

A small insurgency has battled Indonesian rule in the impoverished province ever since. About

Indonesia hails talks with Papuan rebel leader

Geschreven door Herald Tribune
vrijdag 20 maart 2009 01:00

100,000 Papuans — a sixth of the population — have died in military operations.

In the latest incident, suspected rebels last week attacked a security post, killing a government soldier. Papua police chief Maj. Gen. Bagus Ekodanto said Friday there was evidence separatists were planning to foil provincial elections next month.