

## Reporters on Papua protests freed

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**Four Dutch journalists have been freed by police in Indonesia's West Papua.**

**They had been covering pro-independence protests and the return of independence leader, Nicholas Jouwe, after 40 years of exile in the Netherlands.**



Independence activists in West Papua, Indonesia, want a referendum

Formerly called Irian Jaya, the region was incorporated into Indonesia after Dutch rule, in 1969, in a process seen by tribal leaders as a sham.

Indonesian authorities keep a tight grip on the province, and on media coverage of it.

Indonesian police chief Bagus Eko Danto said the journalists did not have a permit to cover the protests.

"Nicholas Jouwe's group had already left the area in the morning but they also covered the rally, despite not having permits," he said.

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The four journalists included the NRC Handelsblad newspaper's Jakarta correspondent Elske Schouten and three documentary makers.

### Referendum call

On Tuesday, about 1,000 protesters marched on the provincial parliament to call for a boycott of national elections, scheduled for 9 April.

Surrounded by a heavy police presence, they demanded a referendum on independence.

The protesters chanted "Free Papua" and "Boycott the election" and carried banners calling for an end to Jakarta's heavy-handed military presence in the region.

The 85-year-old Nicholas Jouwe arrived in Indonesia last week, calling for peace between the Indonesian government and Papuans during a meeting with Welfare Minister Aburizal Bakrie.

Sporadic protests and regular security crackdowns have marked the long-running insurgency by the pro-independence Free Papua Movement (OPM).

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

Last week, suspected rebels attacked a security post, killing a government soldier.

The remote resource-rich province is home to the Grasberg mine, which is operated by Freeport-McMoRan Copper and Gold Inc of the United States.

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The mine has the world's largest recoverable copper reserves and largest gold reserves.

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