

**JAYAPURA, Indonesia: Police have released four Dutch journalists who were held for questioning in Indonesia's restive Papua province as they reported on a pro-independence rally, an official said Wednesday.**

But three were being refused permission to leave Papua and their passports had been confiscated, an immigration official said.

The reporters were taken into custody Tuesday as they covered the return of Nicolaas Jouwe, a founder of the pro-independence Free Papua Movement, from more than 40 years in exile in The Netherlands.

Local immigration chief Raden Hendiartono said they were searched and questioned about their reporting activities in the rugged eastern province, which is normally barred to foreign journalists for security reasons.

"We searched them and asked for an explanation," Hendiartono told AFP, adding they were held in police custody for about 12 hours.

"They were suspected of misusing their permission to report on Nicolaas Jouwe. But we didn't find anything so we let them go," he said.

One of the journalists had gone to the Indonesian capital Jakarta but the other three had had their passports confiscated for "investigation" and cannot leave Papua, he said.

"We have put them in a hotel and they are free to leave their rooms and walk around the hotel without supervision. But they can't leave Papua, they can't leave Indonesia, and they can't do any reporting until we return them their passports," Hendiartono said.

The 85-year-old Jouwe arrived in Indonesia last week, calling for peace between the Indonesian government and Papuans but refusing to explicitly renounce the Papuan independence movement.

Papua, which sits on the western end of New Guinea island, was formally incorporated into Indonesia after a 1969 UN-backed vote by tribal elders widely seen as a sham.

The government heavily restricts access to the region by foreign journalists and Indonesian security forces there are accused of widespread human rights abuses.

- AFP/yt