

3 Dutch Reporters Released But Still Can't Leave Papua

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Jayapura. Police have released four Dutch journalists who were held for questioning in West Papua Province for reporting on a pro-independence rally, but barred three of them from leaving the province, it was reported on Thursday.

The three journalists prevented from leaving the province are Gabriela Babette, Peter Mariaw Smith and Ronald Wigman of the Dutch NRC TV, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said.

Local immigration chief Raden Hendiarsono told AFP that the journalists were searched and questioned about their reporting activities in the resource-rich province, which is normally off limits to foreign journalists.

“We searched them and asked for an explanation,” Hendiarsono said, adding they were held in police custody for about 12 hours. “They were suspected of misusing their permission to report on Nicolaas Jouwe,” he said.

Jouwe is a founder of the pro-independence Free Papua Movement, or OPM, who was given permission to return to his homeland after more than 40 years in exile in the Netherlands. His arrival in Jayapura sparked demonstrations by people opposed to Indonesian occupation of the region, with many concerned, wrongly, that Jouwe supported integration with Indonesia.

It was this demonstration that the four Dutch journalists had been covering.

Foreign Minister Hassan Wirajuda said at the State Palace on Wednesday that the three journalists prevented from leaving Jayapura had abused their tourist visit visas.

“It is wrong for a foreign journalist to come to Indonesia with a tourist visa and then carry out

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journalist activities," Wirajuda said.

He said the Papua immigration authorities were sure that the reporters who had entered Indonesia using tourist visas had worked as journalists. It was likely that they would be deported, he said.

However, Jayapura Immigration Office head Hendiartono said the three journalists could be punished with a maximum sentence of five years in prison and Rp 25 million (\$2,175) in fines, or be given administrative sanctions such as deportation, followed by temporary blacklisting.

The NRC TV journalists and Elske Schouten, the NRC Handelsblad newspaper's Jakarta correspondent, who has been released and returned to Jakarta, were arrested separately.

According to local sources, Ronald Wigman was in the middle of the demonstration organized by the West Papua National Committee in Taman Imbi in Jayapura. As the crowd began to move toward the West Papua Provincial Legislative Council to demand the withdrawal of military forces from Papua, Wigman was observed taking pictures with his cellphone.

Papua was a Dutch colony and remained one until 1962 following UN intervention.