

Outlawed West Papua independence petition presented to the United Nations

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Posted about 2 hours ago

A secret petition demanding a new independence referendum for West Papua has been presented to the United Nations.

The Indonesian Government banned the petition in the provinces of West Papua and Papua, threatening that those who signed it will be arrested and face jail.

But the document was smuggled between villages where it has been signed by 1.8 million West Papuans, more than 70 per cent of the province's population.

Advocates argue that West Papuans have been denied a legitimate self-determination process, since it was incorporated into Indonesia in 1969.

The petition demands a free vote on West Papua's independence as well as the appointment of a UN representative, to investigate reports of human rights violations by Indonesian security forces.

The Prime Minister of Solomon Islands, Manasseh Sogavare, said the petition was incredibly important and the people of West Papua had effectively already voted to demand their self-determination.

"They have come in numbers to express their hope for a better future," Mr Sogavare said in his UN General Assembly speech.

United Liberation Movement for West Papua spokesman Benny Wenda said signing the petition was a "dangerous act" for West Papuans, with 57 people arrested for supporting the petition, and 54 tortured by Indonesian security forces during the campaign.

"The Global Petition for West Papua, run in tandem with the West Papuan People's Petition, was also targeted and the platform that initially hosted it, Avaaz, was blocked throughout all of Indonesia," he said.

Jason Macleod, of University of Sydney's Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, said the petition needed to be understood as a "fundamental rejection" of the Indonesian Government's claim of sovereignty over West Papua.

"In a very clear and direct manner, the petition represents Papuans' demand for decolonisation and self-determination, their desire to freely and fairly determine their own future," Dr Macleod said.



PHOTO: Benny Wenda said dozens of people had been arrested for supporting the petition. (Reuters: Tom Miles)

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