

Papua, Integrity and Susilo's Presidency ¹

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The downfall of former president Soeharto on May 21, 1998, undoubtedly fuelled the widespread revival of free speech among the people -- including Papuans -- in determining their own future. And as the reform movement, or reformasi, swept across the archipelago, it revealed itself in Papua with the indigenous people of the province demanding merdeka -- or simply "M" among locals -- meaning separation from Indonesia. Many reasons lie behind this demand, but they can basically be grouped into three main categories.

First of all are those factors related to human rights violations. Issues included under this category are extrajudicial executions, disappearances, torture and arbitrary detention of civilians, as well as disrespect of the government and the private sector for the indigenous people's customary rights to natural resources.

Second, are factors related to Papua's political history. Many Papuans believe that they have not been given a fair chance to determine their own future. They claim that the New York Agreement drawn up in 1962 under the auspices of the United Nations to end the dispute between Indonesia and the Dutch over Netherlands New Guinea -- the former name for Papua -- was done without consulting the Papuan people and without their consent.

Third, are factors related to the unfair distribution of wealth and social services. Papua is one of the most wealthy provinces of Indonesia due to its natural resources: minerals, oil and gas, forest products and fish. Yet, these resources are continually tapped for the benefit of others. Furthermore, the Papuans' efforts to claim their rights have met repeatedly with stern military/police actions.

Fourth, at the micro level is the economic discrepancy that has already caused social jealousy and is manifested in the marginalisation of the indigenous people in their positions and role in the modern economy.

As a result, many indigenous Papuans came to believe that 35 years was long enough a time to measure Indonesia's seriousness in improving the Papuan people's welfare through equal treatment.

Facing the increasing demand for a self-determination ballot or an independence referendum, the People's Consultative Assembly, the highest law-making body in the country, reached a consensus to give Papua the authority to deal with its own affairs under special autonomy, stipulated in Assembly Decree No. 4/1999. Despite their scepticism, the Papuan people accepted the special autonomy as a means to resolve the issue.

In its implementation, however, Jakarta again deceived the Papuan people with its reluctance to fully enforce Law No. 21/2001 on special autonomy for Papua, a new legislation endorsed by the government and the House of Representatives. Fearing that special autonomy would be used as a political vehicle to promote Papuan independence, former president Megawati Soekarnoputri delayed the establishment of the Papuan Consultative Assembly (MRP) and the issuance of necessary government regulations to enforce the law. Worse, Megawati issued the controversial Presidential Instruction No. 1/2003 to enforce Law No. 45/1999 on the division of Papua into three provinces for security, political and economical interests.

The Papuan people knew that then-chief security minister Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono disagreed with Jakarta's betrayal of the national consensus on Papua. Consequently, the majority of Papuans voted for Susilo-Kalla in the presidential election upon the single hope that he would implement the Special Autonomy Law on Papua and resolve the issue.

The question remains as to why the Papuans preferred a retired army general than Megawati, even though many of them had suffered under the heavy military presence in the province since 1963. Furthermore, how should Susilo and his administration respond to their trust and mandate?

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Susilo was viewed by many Papuans as the only other minister in Megawati's Cabinet besides foreign minister Hassan Wirayuda who was consistent in maintaining that special autonomy was the solution to the Papua issue. Obviously, Papuans gave their mandate to Susilo for one reason: he was perceived as the leader most likely to keep the government's promises under the Special Autonomy Law on Papua. He thus has no option but to fulfil this promise during his presidency.

First, it is imperative that Susilo immediately pledge his intention to implement special autonomy in Papua fully, and use the law as the basis for his policies on the province.

Second, Susilo needs to set up a capable institution to assist him in managing the complex problems of Papua. This institution should be manned by individuals he trusts -- and equally important, these individuals must also be accepted by Papuans.

Third, a government regulation on the MRP should be issued within the first 100 days of the Susilo administration. The draft regulation was submitted in July 2002 by the provincial legislature and should have been approved by August of that year, as stipulated in Article 72 of the Special Autonomy Law on Papua.

Fourth, the controversial Presidential Instruction should be reviewed. Even without a specific presidential instruction, the division of Papua into three provinces will eventually take place as anticipated in Article 76 of the Special Autonomy Law. As such, the Susilo administration needs to issue the regulation on MRP, and the province will be divided into three as stipulated. Supremacy of law should be the key principle of the Susilo administration in dealing with the division of Papua. The so-called "political reality" of Western Papua province, created by a mere presidential instruction, should be dealt with by using the Special Autonomy Law.

Fifth, the government must engage in a series of constructive dialog with different circles in Papuan society.

Finally, it is crucial that the government and the Papuan people begin preparations for a new era under a fully implemented special autonomy.

It is no exaggeration to say that special autonomy is the only remaining option for Indonesia to maintain Papua, peacefully and constitutionally, as an integral part of the country. If the Papuan people's trust erodes further due to the inconsistency and inability of the new administration -- including the local government -- to deliver the promises made under the Special Autonomy Law, the national integrity inclusive of Papua will come under tremendous threat.

If the Susilo administration is serious about the implementation of special autonomy in Papua, and the Papuan government and people fulfil their responsibilities, we will witness a significant improvement in the socio-political situation in Papua from 2004 to 2009. On the other hand, if special autonomy fails to be applied during Susilo's term, Indonesia's nightmare of losing Papua will very likely come true.