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INDONESIA CSW calls for dialogue on Papua question

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) is calling for the establishment of a locally-led, internationally-mediated dialogue process to address grave political, social, humanitarian and human rights concerns in West Papua, Indonesia.

Earlier this week CSW completed a fact-finding visit to Indonesia, which included four days in West Papua. The team heard repeated calls for dialogue from a variety of Papuan organizations. CSW also heard evidence of human rights abuses and serious humanitarian challenges, including concerns over poor health care and education provision, the spread of HIV/AIDS, environmental degradation, militarization and demographic changes.

Migration from other parts of Indonesia has had a major impact on Papuan society, and experts fear that Papuans could become a marginalized minority in the near future. Key jobs and business opportunities appear to be taken by migrants, while Papuans face discrimination. Pressure is growing in Papua itself for a solution, as Papuans increasingly feel frustrated with the current situation.

Indonesia took control of West Papua from the Netherlands in 1962, without the consent of the Papuan people. In 1969, a sham consultation was conducted with handpicked Papuan delegates, and the 'Act of Free Choice' ratified Indonesian sovereignty. In 2001, a new special autonomy arrangement was introduced, but today many Papuans believe the current arrangement has not delivered anything meaningful for their people. Last week, the Papuan People's Assembly (MRP) formally handed back the Special Autonomy status, and an estimated 10,000 people demonstrated in support of a new agreement for Papua.

CSW-UK's National Director Stuart Windsor said: "Our team met with a number of key individuals and organizations in West Papua, and the message they received was a resounding call for dialogue. It is clear that Papuans are becoming a minority in their own land. The potential for religious tensions to rise is also there, as the predominantly Christian Papuans feel discrimination from the largely Muslim migrants. The presence of Islamist groups in Papua remains a concern. Health, education and the environment are all further challenges that need solutions. The Papua question cannot be resolved by violence, and therefore dialogue must be the way forward. Indonesia acted with impressive responsibility in seeking a peaceful solution in Aceh, and CSW hopes the Indonesian government will take a similar approach to Papua. We encourage a home-grown process led by Indonesians and Papuans, but recommend the presence of international mediators."