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INDONESIA CSW highlights plight of Papuan people on 50th anniversary of independence

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) remains deeply concerned at the plight of the Papuan people following reports of an alleged crackdown by Indonesian military and police on religious ceremonies marking the 50th anniversary of West Papuan independence from the Dutch.

The anniversary was marked around the region by religious ceremonies, including the raising of the Papuan 'Morning Star' flag, a symbol of independence. Reverend Socratez Sofyan Yoman, Chairman of the Alliance of Papuan Baptist Churches, told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation that several people taking part in flag-raising ceremonies have been shot and others arrested by Indonesian security forces. He stated, "We are here. How can they do this? We are the owners of this land. How can these outside people, these outside people be coming in and killing, arrest and torture us continually?"

According to media reports, in one religious ceremony in Timika Indah field, four civilians were allegedly shot by police after the raising of the 'Morning Star' flag. The four victims are currently alive and undergoing treatment at hospital, according to a local source. The commander of the Military Command in West Papua has denied the reports.

News of this crackdown comes just over a month after the Indonesian regime brutally suppressed peaceful demonstrations at the Papuan People's Congress on October 19, killing six people.

CSW was instrumental in organizing a hearing on November 29 in the European Parliament's Sub-committee on Human Rights, in which the worsening human rights situation in West Papua was discussed. In a written statement, Father Neles Tebay called upon the European Union (EU) to support the Indonesian government in engaging in open dialogue with the Papuan people.

CSW's Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston said, "The ongoing and brutal suppression of peaceful protests in West Papua is a clear violation of the human rights of the Papuan people to freedom of assembly, expression and religion. CSW is concerned about rising tensions in West Papua and increased police brutality. We urge the international community to facilitate a meaningful dialogue between the Indonesian government and the Papuan people, with the help of international mediation, and to encourage the Indonesia, as a member of the UN Human Rights Council and Chairman of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), to uphold the rule of law and protect human rights in West Papua."