



**DEBATE: Should West Papua be independent?
Melbourne University Debating Society v Monash Association of Debaters**

**SAMPARI FORUM FOR WEST PAPUA
ACU ART GALLERY, 26 Brunswick St, Fitzroy (Melbourne)**

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West Papuans deserve to exert autonomy in deciding how they want to live, and I think that everybody in the room can agree that is absolutely true. However, the negative team has argued that independence would be costly and harmful in the short and medium term, and that in the current climate of the international community it is likely to hurt the West Papuan population in a lot of ways. The negative team believes that there are better ways to achieve the change that everyone in this room can agree that we want for the West Papuan population.

I'm going to talk about three things in this speech. Firstly, I'm going to ask how does West Papua achieve independence. Secondly, I'm going to ask what are the effects of achieving that independence. And then lastly I'm going to talk a little bit about culture.

So onto this first question about how West Papua will actually realistically get independence. Because the affirmative team wanted to claim that Indonesia has incentives to allow independence and that they will pass this onto the West Papuan community peacefully. The first thing to note there is that historically that has just not been the case. Indonesia has been very quick to clamp down on the majority of independence movements that exist within West Papua. They have been in a lot of cases very violent towards that, and we think there is very little to suggest that that Indonesian position has changed substantially to the present date.

But what are the incentives that they gave us? Firstly, they told us that it was costly for Indonesia to maintain control over the West Papuan population. There are a couple of things that we have to say on this. Firstly, Indonesia has moved a lot of its population to West Papua, and that means that they have an incentive to administer that state, because it will also result in the well-being of their own citizens. And so we think that in that instance, Indonesia isn't likely to support that. But secondly, Indonesia needs the profits that its gets from extracting resources from the West Papuan provinces. And what they get from the Freeport mine in West Papua is incredibly important to them, and we think it is likely that they are going to try and hold onto that and they are unlikely to see that peacefully.

The second incentive that they gave us was that there are other provinces within Indonesia that are seeking independence and that is likely to spur Indonesia to give more freedom. We think that it is actually more likely that Indonesia will treat these independence movements harshly because of provinces like Aceh, because they don't want to set a precedent of allowing their

provinces to become independent, because that would be something that is dangerous for them, and would potentially result in a massive loss of territory for them. So we thought that in both of those instances Indonesia was unlikely to support the independence movements in those ways.

So on the negative team, what do we think that West Papua would realistically have to do to achieve the independence that they want. We told you that they would probably have to fight a war against Indonesia. And we told you that we thought that that would likely to be long and hard and costly. There are two outcomes that could happen in that scenario. Firstly they could win. Obviously this is a solution that most people in this room want. However, even if this happens, we think that it would be incredibly costly. We think that the war would cost a lot of lives. We think that it would devastate the population. And we think that it becomes incredibly hard to build a peaceful state when you've have been in a climate of violence and war.

The other outcome is that West Papua loses. We think that this may happen for a number of reasons. Firstly, Indonesia has a strong army that has been trained by many other armies around the world, and they have shown in many instances that they are not afraid to use that army. But secondly we think that West Papua has been practicing non-violent resistance and that it would be difficult for them to re-arm in order to fight that war and in order to regain that territory. We think that would be hard.

So what else did the affirmative team tell us? They told us the international community would support this claim, and that this is a mechanism that they wanted to get. We think it would be a great if the international community would be able support this, but we think that there are a lot of incentives that mean that they are unlikely to. And we think that's a shame, but that it's just realistic. Why is that the case? Firstly Indonesia is viewed as a very important state in the region. It is viewed as being an important bastion of stability in the Asia region. We think that they are lots of trade agreements that Indonesia has with places like Australia, China, and America. We think that the international community has shown again and again that it will prioritize their economic agreements with these countries over human rights. We think it is unlikely that they are going to give maximum support to the West Papuan independence movement, even though that is what ultimately we would like them to do.

So what would happen if West Papua did get this independence? We think that there are a couple of things if that were the case. The affirmative team told us firstly that the West Papuan state would have a developed administration and that they would be able to administer a new state. We think that is likely the case. We think that the West Papuans have the ability to form a strong and stable government. Unfortunately, as Ben and Zoe told you, that state would be unlikely to receive support and recognition from the international community. And at that point it becomes incredibly difficult for you to form trade agreements, for you to enter into negotiations with the UN. If you are alienated by the international community in that way, it is just impossible for you to build that kind of state, and we think that that is likely to happen.

What is the second thing that they told us? They said that West Papuans would be able to control their economic resources. We think that multi-national corporations have a long history of exploiting natural resources in countries like West Papua. We think that they do that all the time. We think that it is likely in the case that Indonesia leaves the West Papua region, that these multi-national corporations would go in and seize control of what is a very profitable mine, and would continue to exploit them. We think that it would probably be harder for West Papua to have leverage in negotiations with those multi-national corporations, and to regulate them, because they don't have the kind of leverage that comes when you're partnered with a large economic state like Indonesia. We think that is likely to be harmful in a number of ways. We think that in the current climate the formation of the state probably wouldn't be that viable and we think that it would ultimately harm a lot of West Papuan people.

So onto the final question of culture, because the other thing that the affirmative team wanted to tell us was that it would be easier for West Papuans to preserve their culture. We think that West Papuans have demonstrated an incredible ability to resist the attempted erasure of their culture by external forces. And we think that the fact that we are in this room, and we are looking at this art that has been produced by West Papuans shows that they will continue to do that in the future. And that despite the attempts of Indonesia they will not be able to erase the cultural and historical heritage of West Papuan people. We think they can still unite against a movement that seeks to achieve peaceful change, that seeks to advocate in the international community for the independence of West Papua without pressing for the actual separation of that state which we think is going to be very humble.

In a perfect world West Papua would be independent and they would be able to exert autonomy over the way that they want to live their lives and the way that they want to administer their state. Unfortunately we actually live in a very unjust and unfair world, and we think that it is unlikely to happen in a way that is fair to the West Papuan people. That is why we stand against independence.