

Canberra's treaty 'killing off' Papuan democracy

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Free West Papua campaigners Nick Chesterfield and Jacob Rumbiak say the treaty with Indonesia will thwart human rights controls in the province and threaten security. Photo: *Paul Rovere*

AUSTRALIA was "killing off" democracy in Papua with its impending treaty with Indonesia, a Papuan leader has said in Melbourne.

Jacob Rumbiak, foreign affairs co-ordinator for the West Papuan National Authority — which describes itself as Papua's transitional government — said yesterday that Australia would be stopping international monitoring of human rights abuses by the Indonesian military in Papua.

"It will close West Papua from the rest of the world," especially to those concerned about human rights and the environment, he said.

He also warned it would "create opportunities for international terrorists based in West Papua to create instability in the Pacific".

The treaty, to be signed on Monday, includes expansion of military and intelligence ties, recognition of Indonesian sovereignty over Papua and agreement to suppress supporters of independence.

"They wanted this treaty to stop the misunderstanding between Indonesia and the Australian Government because of the 43 who arrived in Australia," Mr Rumbiak said, referring to the Papuan asylum seekers who arrived in Australia in January and were granted protection.

"The treaty is not the solution," he said. "It cannot stop the West Papuan struggle to defend West Papuan land, peace and justice.

"The Australian Government should understand the 43 asylum seekers left West Papua because West Papua was not safe for them."

The treaty would not deter future asylum seekers, he said.

A spokesman for the Free West Papua campaign, Nick Chesterfield, said: "The agreement is neither contributing to West Papua's, Indonesia's or Australia's security because it is aligning Australia with the wishes of TNI (the Indonesian military), which is the source of all the instability problems in our region."

A former Papua resident and human rights campaigner, Anglican minister Peter Woods, questioned the implications of the agreement for "those who are legitimately supporting West Papuans' aspirations in Australia and the attitude of the Australian Government towards that".

Newspoll findings released yesterday found 64 per cent of Australians supported access to Papua for journalists and 72 per cent supported access for human rights monitors. The nationwide poll of 1200 respondents prompted calls for the treaty to guarantee access to the province.