

SENATOR JANET RICE, Debate-speech, Yarra Room, Melbourne Town Hall, 30 October 2022
(video-recording 53:04—1:00)

Sarah Muyunga: Senator Janet Rice who has served as a Greens member of the Australian Parliament in Canberra since 2013 is our final speaker. The Australian Greens is the only Australian political party that recognises the West Papuan peoples' right to self-determination. Many thanks Senator Rice.

Senator Janet Rice

Thank you Sarah. And thank you everyone for being with us today, particularly the West Papuan people, and particularly Dr Jacob Rumbiak. It is a real honour to be speaking with you in the audience today.

I want to acknowledge that we are on the lands of the Bunurong and the Wurundjeri peoples and pay our respects to their elders past and present. And to committing ourselves to be working for justice and working for treaties with our First Nations brothers and sisters here, which is so relevant when we are talking about self-determination and justice for the people of West Papua.

Is Australia doing enough to support the people of West Papua? It is clear that the answer is resoundingly 'no'.

You don't need to look beyond the tragic death of Zode Hilapok, a West Papua who died in jail just in the last week. Zode was arrested for flying the Morning Star flag on 1st December last year along with seven of his colleagues. They were all jailed, and he has just died in jail in the last week of some mystery illness. He is the latest West Papuan who has suffered and died under the brutal occupation of the West Papuan people since the Indonesian invasion of West Papua.

As my colleague Pablo has so eloquently outlined: the brutal history, the hundreds of thousands of people killed, the many more people who have been dispossessed, the land that has been stolen, the environmental degradation that has gone on as part of that. There has been too much blood that has been spilt. And it is time for it to stop.

And as my colleague Morris from Vanuatu also said, there is a way forward. And he outlined the legal framework which the West Papuan Provisional Government is now pursuing, of getting West Papua put on the UN Decolonisation List, so that the West Papuan people can determine for themselves, and have that self-determination over their future.

That is what Australia needs to be supporting. That is what Australia needs to be acknowledging: the legal right of the West Papuan people to self-determination. It is not just a moral right, or a political right, as strong as those are. It is their international legal right that Australia should be getting behind and supporting.

But yet, the opposition here have been arguing that we are doing enough. Clearly we are not. I mean their arguments, basically, were pretty spurious I thought, with the first one saying 'we didn't do enough in the past, but we are doing enough now'. Frankly there is so much more we can be doing now.

And that doing *something* is enough: the fact that I speak out as a Green Senator on West Papua, and I think I am the only one who has spoken out in recent years, as if that's enough.

That we are visiting West Papua. Yes, that's very good that the new government is visiting. But it's not enough.

And then of course the geo-political reality. Yes, we have to acknowledge the geo-political reality. We have to acknowledge the complexity of the relationship with Indonesia. But that actually means we have got to be doing more. We've got to be having greater diplomatic engagement with Indonesia.

Yes, a very important relationship is the economic connections between our countries. But the relationship will be stronger and the security of the Pacific, the security and stability of Indonesia as well as in Australia will be stronger if we put human rights at the centre of that.

Otherwise West Papua is just going to continue to fester. It's not going to go away. The brutal force that Indonesia is applying to West Papua at the moment is not going to stop the independence movement. It's not going to stop the legitimate aspirations of the West Papuan people to be allowed to determine their own future.

And so actually Australia being a critical friend for Indonesia is what's needed. We need to do so much more to be that critical friend.

I'm going to use the rest of my time to outline just what more we should be doing. There's a very simple thing to be begun with, which doesn't require any consideration of the geo-political reality, and that's for us to acknowledge that the human rights abuses are occurring in West Papua; for our government to acknowledge that, and to say up front that they are happening and they are unacceptable.

And then to stop providing training to the officials who are actually complicit in those human rights abuses. We fund the Jakarta Centre for Law Enforcement and Compliance which is jointly funded and run by the Australian Government. There is very little in terms of what's done to make sure that the people we are training aren't human rights abusers. And I've asked questions in Senate Estimates about that.

The very least we should be saying to Indonesia is 'No, we are not going to train Indonesian Police who have a history of being human rights abusers, and who are complicit in what's going on in West Papua. And we want the Indonesian Government to make sure that human rights are respected.

The second thing we need to be doing is holding our major corporations who are operational in West Papua to account, and make sure that they too are supportive of the legitimate rights of the West Papuan people. We know that Rio Tinto profited so much from the Grasberg Mine. We've got other companies that are profiting in West Papua. We need to be holding them to account.

Thirdly, we need to be much more active, and much more vocal on the international stage, in support of the request by the Pacific Islands Forum to address the *root causes of the conflict*, and in support of the motion being put forward by Vanuatu for West Papua to be placed on the *UN Decolonisation List*.

So we need to be really outspoken at an international level, and then applying diplomatic pressure on Indonesia to immediately withdraw its forces from West Papua, and for Indonesia to allow free and unfettered entry for human rights observers, beginning with UN Human Rights Observers.

So it's very very clear that we are not doing enough. We are not upholding human rights, or the moral rights, or the legal rights of the West Papuan people. We have not taken steps that we can, we should and we must take.

For the sake of Zode Hilapok and all the hundreds of thousands of West Papuans who have sadly been deceased and who are suffering now, killed by Indonesians before him, we have to do more. And I am confident that we can do more and we should do more. Thank you very much.