

Demographic transition in West Papua and claims of genocide.

Claims are sometimes made that genocide is occurring in West Papua. However the situation in West Papua is not akin to the Nazi holocaust: there are no death camps; no specifically designed incinerators and no government policies or statements such as Hitler made in relation to the Jewish people. West Papua is also not like Rwanda, where 800,000 people were killed in the space of a few months in a clear act of genocide. The killings in West Papua have taken place, as Clements Runawery has noted, over a period of decades: he calls it a 'slow-motion genocide'¹.

Since the Indonesian takeover in 1963 there have been many killings, disappearances, forced land expropriations and other repressive government policies that have severely affected the demographics of West Papua. These may constitute genocide and they put the onus on signatories of the 1951 United Nations Convention on Genocide to investigate the veracity or otherwise of associated accusations and claims.

An examination of successive Indonesian government censuses reveals the changing demographics of West Papua. I have used as my starting point the 1971 census conducted by the Indonesian Statistics Office. It would be more appropriate to use earlier figures dating to the effective takeover by Indonesia in 1963; however this would entail drawing on Dutch colonial sources, which would be open to dispute by some. Using entirely Indonesian sources makes comparison between and across different census periods less contentious.

In 1971 there were 887,000 'Irian born' (Melanesian Papuans) people in West Papua and 36,000 'non-Irian born' (Asian Indonesians), out of a total population of 923,000. This meant that, even after eight years of Indonesian control, Papuans comprised 96% of the population in 1971²

Thereafter the distinction between Irian born and non-Irian became less relevant as, obviously, children of non-Irian born migrants were Irian born. I have derived the figure for the Papuan population in the 1990 census by dividing the population into those who speak Bahasa Indonesia as a 'mother tongue' and those who do not. This is because the census does not record the racial profile of the province. On this basis there were 1,215,897 Papuans and 414,210 non-Papuans in 1990 out of a total population of 1,630,107. Papuans comprised 74.6% of the total and non-Papuans 25.4%³.

The growth in the Papuan population from 887,000 to 1,215,897 during the period 1971 to 1990 represents an annual growth rate of 1.67%. Assuming that this annual growth rate continued to 2005, the Papuan population would be 1,558,795 out of a total population of 2,664,489⁴ (the latest total population figure released by the Indonesian government) and a non-Papuan population of 1,087,694. This means that Papuans comprised 59% of the population and non-Papuans 41% in 2005.

¹[1] Clements Runawery talking at the Australian Institute of International Affairs (SA), Adelaide University, September 21, 2006.

² ²[2] *Irian Jaya: Economic Change, Migrants, and Indigenous Welfare*. Chris Manning and Michael Rumbiak in Hal Hill, Ed., *Unity and Diversity, Regional Economic Development in Indonesia since 1970*. Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 1991, p.90.

³[3] Jim Elmslie, *Irian Jaya Under The Gun: Indonesian Economic Development versus West Papuan Nationalism*, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 2002, p. 76.

⁴ ⁴[4] *Population Projection by Regency/Municipality*, BPS-Statistics of Papua Province, Indonesian Government, August 2006.

This analysis shows that the Papuan population has diminished as a proportion of the population from 96% to 59%, and the non-Papuan increased from 4% to 41%. This represents a growth in the Papuan population from 887,000 to 1,558,795 for the period 1971 to 2005, or 75.7%. By contrast the non-Papuan sector of the population has increased from 36,000 to 1,087,694, a growth of 3021% or more than 30 times. This represents an annual growth rate in the non-Papuan population of 10.5% from 1971 to 2005.

Using the two growth rates, for the Papuan and non-Papuan populations, 1.67% and 10.5% respectively, we can predict future population growth and relative percentages of the two groups. By 2011 out of a total population of 3.7 million, Papuans would be a minority of 47.5% at 1.7 million and non-Papuans a majority at 1.98 million, or 53.5%. This non-Papuan majority will increase to 70.8% by 2020 out of a population of 6.7 million. By 2030 Papuans will comprise just 15.2% of a total population of 15.6 million, while non-Papuans will number 13.2 million, or 84.8%. This may be an unduly optimistic forecast for the Papuan population as the current HIV-AIDS epidemic is firmly established in that population group and could have an African-style impact, cutting numbers and growth rates even further.

Besides the relative decline of the Papuans as a percentage of the population they have also enjoyed a much lower growth rate than a very similar Melanesian Papuan population across the border in Papua New Guinea. Here the population has been increasing at 2.6% per annum since independence in 1975. PNG acts almost as a control population when examining Papuan growth rates as the indigenous people on both sides of the border are closely related and settled in societies that had, until very recently, been self-contained for thousands of years. If the Papuans under Indonesian control had enjoyed the same growth rate as those in independent Papua New Guinea, 2.6%, their population would be 2,122,921, or 564,126 more than it was in 2005. This demographic discrepancy can be attributed to Indonesian rule.

Thus from a position of comprising 96% of the total population in 1971, Papuans will be a small and dwindling minority within a generation or two.

Jim Elmslie
Research Fellow
Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies
Sydney University
jelmslie@ozemail.com.au
0407 913 870
April, 2008
