

Fighting for Freedom in West Papua

# RUMBLE IN THE JUNGLE



---

West Papua Solidarity Group  
New Orleans, LA  
[wpsolidarity@yahoo.com](mailto:wpsolidarity@yahoo.com)





**Rumble in the Jungle**  
*Fighting for Freedom in West Papua*

**Websites and Organizations**

**West Papua Solidarity Group- New Orleans**  
wpsolidarity@yahoo.com

**Solidarity South Pacific**  
<http://www.eco-action.org/ssp>

**Free West Papua**  
<http://www.freewestpapua.org>

**Friends of People Close to Nature**  
<http://www.fpcn-global.org/>

**West Papua News**  
<http://www.westpapuanews.com/>

**Rumble in the Jungle**  
*Fighting for Freedom in West Papua*

**This 1998 interview with a representative of the OPM took place in a mystery location in a well-known South Coast seaside resort (not the one you're thinking of), with an inept interviewer, a cheap tape recorder, and drunks singing a rousing chorus of 'Rawhide' in the background.**

West Papua, the western half of the island of New Guinea is home to rich rainforest and a huge range of different tribal groups - accounting for 0.1% of the world's population, but speaking up to 25% of all known languages. In 1963, this former Dutch colony was annexed by Indonesia and became the province of Irian Jaya. In 1969, a fraudulent referendum involving 1025 indigenous people - the 'Act of Free Choice' - ratified the Indonesian occupation. To maintain its control over West Papua's immense natural resources - including some of the world's best mineral deposits - Indonesia has unleashed one of the least-known genocides of the 20th century. Massacres, rape, torture, disappearances, the seizure of land and cultural assimilation policies have been commonplace, with perhaps a sixth of the 1963 population (300,000 people) killed since the occupation began.

Indonesia's policy of 'transmigration' - relocating millions of people from heavily populated Java, Bali and Madura to the outer islands, to consolidate their grip on them - has also done tremendous damage. But almost from the very start, this catalogue of abuses has been met with determined and inspiring resistance, against incredible odds, from the Organisasi Papua Merdeka (OPM) or Free Papua Movement.

**Do or Die Magazine: Can you describe how Indonesia took control in West Papua from 1963?**

**OPM:** My father was included in that process. Because he is one of the people who had contact with outside people (such as missionaries) when Indonesia came and asked for people who give access to us, they said 'Oh, this is one of them,' they included my father, there were 1,025 people...



**This was for the Act of Free Choice, as they call it...**

Yes, this is the story of my father himself. They selected those people based on who they wanted, and they trained them in some Indonesian sentences, like 'I agree with Indonesia' or 'I want Indonesia, I don't want the Dutch' - at least 5 or 6 sentences. My father didn't know the meaning of these sentences. After some weeks, they tested who was doing good in those sentences and my father passed the test, and he was asked to say one of those whole sentences in a meeting.

**So the process was basically a complete joke, would you say?**

Yes. My father is now feeling very, very sorry. He is saying 'Don't repeat my mistake anymore.' At the time they thought Indonesia was coming to help, supporting independence.

**Right, so they didn't realise that they would actually be taken over as part of Indonesia?**

Actually they realized later. And all of the 1,025 are now against Indonesia. When I am here, they are now protesting. They are standing and they say 'I signed these and now I want to pay it back.'

**Did anyone realise that the US was very much behind the Indonesians and was pressurising the UN to hand West Papua over to the Indonesians?**

We didn't realise, but now me and the others are learning, we realise that during the Cold War the US wanted to control the Pacific area.

## **Traditional Tribal Culture**

**How would you describe traditional West Papuan cultures? For example, the relationship between the tribes and the land has been described as the people and the land 'owning' one another. Compared, say, to what you find here in England, what sort of things define West Papuan society?**

That's something I have been talking about. There are many things based on my view that are missing here, like we value the

lem. The second is what made the Dutch allow Indonesia to take our land without our agreement - only of the 1,025 [in the Act of Free Choice].

**Do you think we should put pressure on companies like RTZ, or the Indonesian embassy or whatever, to force them to change?**

Yes. We are speaking out for this. Some people are saying that it is the armies who are killing people, not the companies - and Freeport, for instance, denies any human rights violations by arguing that it is there for business, not for killing people, animals and plants. This is a crazy answer - the Indonesians kill us because they want to secure the mining. Without the companies and the mining there will be no killing anymore, as simple as that. [It's not all by proxy either - Freeport's security guards have also had direct involvement in various incidents.] Indonesia and the companies will respond to pressure - it is clear they are guilty - but now we are trying to find out how to influence, and which angle we can use to put pressure on them. Partly because we don't know how to - as I said, we are fighting now in all ways - and we need people to tell us this is the way the British Government will listen to you, or this is the way that America will do something for you, and we want to listen to those ideas. It's one of the purposes of my mission that I'm bringing here - because my belief is that the traditional leaders are the people, not me - I'm just like the telephone line, communicating between you here and there, to the speakers of the people, the tribal leaders. When I go back, I will be behind them, I won't speak in front.

## **Update:**

In February of 1999, when talks were held between West Papuan delegates and President Habibie of Indonesia, there was only one demand: independence for West Papua. The talks stalled and ultimately failed.



**Rumble in the Jungle**  
*Fighting for Freedom in West Papua*

can't eat it.' I think only people like those politicians and educated people will think about the money. Not the local people, more money is not their concern - their concern is: 'We don't want to die, we don't want to disturb our lands, we don't want these trees to be cut down.' If they live in the traditional house, their concern is different. But those people who have education, we need money only for, say, communication systems - how we can communicate between tribes is one of the most difficult problems now. All over West Papua, it is important for us to build up telecommunication systems and TV and video, just for sharing what's happening in the other villages, opening their minds.

**For sharing and communication in principle that's quite a noble aim - and look at the world I live in; it's got all these things already so I'm in no position to judge. But I think you are likely to get certain difficulties with that - for instance, the Indian government has deliberately introduced TV sets into their tribal villages, to bring them into the mainstream of Indian society and get them living a certain sort of lifestyle.**

Yes, it is a danger.

**Wouldn't ecotourism destroy your culture? The demands that the tourists put, they would want houses, they'd want someone to clean the floor - they wouldn't be happy to live the same way as you do.**

Yes, it's difficult.

**What can we do in support of people in West Papua here in the UK, to force Indonesia to stop their abuses, to increase the demand for independence?**

Yes, one thing is finding out actually what happened with Freeport, the early process, because politicians say 'Where's the proof? So it is nonsense.' We don't have the knowledge of English, or of how to deal with this modern world, but we know there was something wrong between Indonesia and Freeport and US and Dutch. But how can we claim this, how can we go back to the 1960s and prove that this was wrong, that's one main prob-

**Rumble in the Jungle**  
*Fighting for Freedom in West Papua*

collective way of life. We stay in one house or one building, we know each other by names, by background, we greet each morning, we greet: 'Where are you going?' You don't do that here. First time I come here and I was greeting people, they seemed negative, and I smile to people and they feel 'Who are you?' And it is different.

**What sort of relationship is there between the tribes and the land that they exist upon?**

That's one of the things I am missing here. I first came to a big city for a few months, then went to one of the villages over there, and then after a few more months I came here. It is not my way, moving every couple of months, because culturally my habit is getting settled in one place, get to know the trees, whatever I have in the nature, and they know me and I know them, even the animals, whatever, around my life. And when I was in the city, I couldn't do that because I must move, and we don't have any relation with nature, that's what I feel here. But in my place you can see that people are so tied to their land...

**Because the ancestors are in the land too and that's a connection going back hundreds or thousands of years?**

And we feel that we can talk to the land. Many people here don't understand me, but we do. Like plants, like weather - I can say for example 'Rains,' if rain comes, and I can say 'Stop, I'm going to do this' and it can stop. Not because of my magic or whatever as people may suspect, but it is just normal because I understand them and they understand me.

**How has the Indonesian domination affected traditional West Papuan cultures - for example, Operation Koteka [1970s attempt to get Papuans to dress 'properly' - the word is an insulting term for the penis gourds worn by Dani tribesmen. An Indonesian foreign minister said that they were determined to "get them down from the trees even if we have to pull them down"], the punishments for raising the West Papuan 'Morning Star' flag, the teaching of the Pancasila [Indonesia's national ideology], and throwing people off the**



**land and so breaking that connection they have with the land?**

Really, really massive, and it is the suffering I think, where we have been suffering very, very much.

**What sort of form does this take?**

I am writing a book on this topic, to tell my people this is what's happening in our culture with the Christian Church. I don't mean that religion is wrong, but the Church itself - it has its own culture - and they break up our own culture, the social structures. They have their own clergymen who say: 'Don't listen to the tribal leader about this - this is the correct way, ' and that means they destroy our life, which was for whole decades, for generations. This means that we suffer, for we do not know how to step from that to this.

**So you are almost caught between two worlds?**

Two worlds, yes. We are confused, we become victims of this change. We are not well informed in what to do... And the second is the government: they have their own cultural structure that they are imposing on us. They have governors, they have everything, until the village level, where they also impose their own rules. They have programs like family planning, transmigration, translocation; if someone's against it, they must be punished, and they have laws, regulations, and it breaks up everything which was existing in the past. Indonesia has a policy of uniting the diversity; everybody's Indonesian and must speak the Indonesian language, behave like Indonesian people and don't say anything which distinguishes you from the others.

**Which is a bit difficult because there are an awful lot of cultures in West Papua, and there's even more different cultures across the whole Indonesian archipelago.**

It's logically impossible, but they are forcing it. Everybody feels that they are killing us in the long run, they are eliminating our right... We believe that when people take our lands, or exploit our lands, or move us, that is like taking plants and seeds from my land to here and saying 'it can grow here because this is land, this

**How open are the discussions going to be? Are people back in West Papua going to know what's going on or will it be behind closed doors?**

It has been a long story about the Act of Free Choice, which was that we were blaming each other. My people are blaming my father, he did something wrong, and we don't want that to be repeated again, because it disturbed our culture relationship. So now we want to be open, we want to be transparent, we want the 70 to be more responsible to us, because...

**There's going to be hell to pay if they don't!**

Yes. If you do it twice... you knew what happened before and you have learned the risk of those mistakes and don't repeat it again - that is our demand now, and they have this burden on their minds. (laughs) They can come back with the result that we expect them to achieve, you must say whatever it is we ask you to do. And that's independence.

**What would be the attitude to the natural environment in an independent West Papua? What would happen with the logging, with the mining and so on? Obviously, people think they have to make money, but that presupposes certain things, so...**

Most Highlanders like me, we own the mining area, we are saying shut it down, because we can make money from different ways, not only from digging up and breaking our ecosystem. Developing eco-tourism, that is our main concern now, because we have learned from countries in South America where they have done this, and I will push this idea because we have five tribes [around the mining area], and I am from one of the tribes, and I will impose this, mining companies - we can allow them 5 years and then it doesn't help us.

**Assuming the Indonesians left, what would the ecotourism money go towards? If money wasn't seen as necessary before then what's changed, what new needs do you have now?**

Yes, even though, like me, we feel that money is important, there are people in the Highlands saying now 'What's money for? We



**though? Isn't it true that anybody who proclaims independence will be punished, because it is a betrayal of Indonesia?**

That can happen, for somebody. If I say that, it is easy for Indonesia to take me to prison, because I am nobody, I am not a tribal leader, I have no people. That's why we are saying...nobody can say this, just the tribal leaders can say this. Even the Governor is just saying 'OK, we support national government policy' - he hasn't got authority from the people, so if he is against, or for independence, he won't have support.

**But to an extent, the Indonesians have never had authority, they just relied upon military might - so I'm not sure how it's any different now. Because Indonesia has severe economic problems, I assume that they need to keep the money coming in from Grasberg and elsewhere. I thought they'd also just announced a new 5 year plan for the transmigration programme - giving a strong incentive to keep West Papua down, under their thumb, and keep the money rolling in. I don't mean to be pessimistic, but I can see how it might be business as usual.**

It is not easy for Jakarta to let us go, because we feed Jakarta, that's what we say. If they lose us, it means Jakarta will have problems, especially in finances.

**So they have this strong demand for independence building up in West Papua now after 36 years, and yet one of the reasons why they have been there all this time is because it is a huge money spinner, so they don't want to sacrifice the money. I can see how they might try and manipulate the tribal leaders, and so forth.**

Yes, that's my worry. The Church are promising that they are doing their best not to be tricked by the government, but we can't totally believe it, because Indonesia is there in power. But what I personally believe is that Theys Eluay cannot be influenced by whoever, because he has his own position already clearly stated in front of the government; there are 70 people, but only one person himself, our hope is in him.

is soil, this country has soil and that country has soil, so we can just plant here' - it is impossible. It means we are killing it, even though the plant is still alive; so it is with moving people from one village to another, one land to the other.

**Like the way in which lots of Papuan people have been relocated from, say, the Central Highlands to the Lowlands, and they don't have the malaria you find in the Lowlands. They know how to live in the Highlands.**

But not on the coast! We suffer much. People from the coast, they know, and they don't have any serious malarial disease. You go there and you can see that many people are in the hospital - they are from the Highlands, the many troubles are with the Highlanders, with those who are moved from one place to another. Even the Javanese, they have many, many troubles.

**With transmigration, hundreds of thousands of people have been brought over to West Papua and to the other islands like Sulawesi or Sumatra, and in some cases it might have worked, but in many cases it's almost like they've been dumped in that area. In your experience are the transmigrants doing badly or well?**

The transmigrants and us, we are just victims of those policy-makers, so they are also suffering, but they don't know how to claim or who to blame. I have been with transmigrants for about 3 years, visiting them when I was studying at the university, and they were expressing their concern: 'We miss our lands and our cities and this is a different land.' They were thinking West Papua was good for them, but it is hot, and the land is different, and how they cultivate the rice.

**Do they still try to cultivate it as they did in Java?**

They tried, but they are failing - because even though they have large lands, they don't produce as they produce in Java. Some of them sell their lands and go back to Java.

**Is it true that when you clear the jungle the soil itself is quite poor; so it doesn't work when it is cleared in transmigration**



**Rumble in the Jungle**  
*Fighting for Freedom in West Papua*

**projects, say for the oil palm plantations, but the way Papuans have done it does work because you are still keeping most of the forest cover instead of clearing a huge great area?**

I would say that we have our own way, which is better. We know how to balance the ecosystem, because we know very well what will happen - without any scientific knowledge we know how to balance it. In my culture we only cut the trees and make gardens in a special place. We don't hunt there, we know where to farm and where not to farm. You cannot hunt every time you want, but we have regulations saying that this is the month or the day you can hunt. These regulations come from our culture. We have people in power to say 'Now you can go and hunt', and if we plant crops, 'Now you can take your crops or not.' I cannot say 'This is my plant and I want to take it' - in my culture I must wait for instructions to take it. But it doesn't work now. Government officials or the Army come and want to take it - just take it... 'This is my power, I can take whatever I want'... and this is breaking up our culture. We told the tribal leaders that what we have already is good.

**Because the modern life is attractive to some groups? It holds lots of promise for them?**

Yes. We were thinking that influences from outside are good, but now from here I see that no, we were better off than now - many things are missing here - like relations with the people, relations with the nature, with the animals. I cannot find them here.

### **Impact of the Indonesian Occupation**

**This, I don't know, may be a bit painful, but in the last few years we've heard a lot about the genocide perpetrated against East Timor, perhaps a third of the population killed. Have the people of West Papua experienced similar horrific treatment at the hands of the Indonesians?**

I myself was in some of the wars, not fighting, but when I was a child. And I saw myself, people were killed. I think compared to East Timor, West Papua is worse.

**Rumble in the Jungle**  
*Fighting for Freedom in West Papua*

tomorrow to Java for that dialogue, led by Church leaders, who are playing very important roles now. They are saying 'No manipulation, no games from the government. No trickery. We want to let people say whatever they want, whether it is against, or for Indonesia, it doesn't matter.' What we want is that they talk for themselves - the Church for West Papua is saying 'We are new Church, we work for the people, we help people to speak out for their own rights,' so they have selected 70 people from the whole. I can say that this is the second Act of Free Choice.

**Well, yes, that's what I was afraid of in a way.**

And there is a tribal leader who was involved in the Act of Free Choice, he is now the leader of the West Papuan tribal council.

**This is Theys Eluay, the guy who recently got arrested for discussing independence. Is he out of prison now?**

He can't be kept in prison, because he has people - if he is imprisoned, thousands of people will come, so they can't do anything to him [unfortunately Eluay was killed by the Indonesian military in November of 2001].

**So this is like a breakthrough, really - my impression is that it is starting to build up what you could call an irresistible momentum - the spirit was so strong, the momentum was so strong.**

So strong.

**That it's going to be very difficult for Jakarta to sell them out.**

Now Jakarta is offering autonomy, and autonomy plus, as they call it - but people are saying 'Not these two, we want independence, your agenda is yours, but this dialogue is from us, not the government agenda. We proposed, we initiated, we suggested and our goal is independence.' So in these weeks, January, February, it is very clear, they are open, people acclaim now 'Yes, we want independence.' They can be honest about it.

**That's great. Aren't people still being repressed as well**



**Rumble in the Jungle**  
*Fighting for Freedom in West Papua*

**And that was linked to the fact that for the first time women were spokespeople as opposed to the men being the representatives. People thought this was a breakthrough when they met Jim Bob, and this was partly linked with the fact that it was the women who had spoken to him.**

Yes. We thought women are talking for our people, which never happened before now, and a lot of sympathy among our tribal people, that now it is women who are talking for us, and let us support it.

**And they didn't mind that even though it had been perhaps against the previous customs?**

Culturally, they had no problem. The people supported her, they say 'Go woman, say more.' That was the first historical step in that culture, where women can talk, and now women are feeling, 'We can say something for the people now, and this person cried because of us, which didn't happen when men were talking to him. We changed him.' The men agree, we can't do that to that point. Only women can do that. Women have some abilities to do certain things, and that's why we are saying 'OK, you have done something, now go on, develop what you can do next.'

**West Papua After Suharto -  
What does the Future Hold?**

**I was wondering if the prospects for West Papua have improved since the downfall of Suharto. Habibie [Suharto's replacement] has talked of independence for East Timor - is anything similar on the cards for West Papua? I know talks were planned for sometime this year. West Papua seems a lot stronger since the fall of Suharto - pro-Papuan demonstrations in Jakarta, a series of flag raisings across West Papua, and as you say, the spirit of independence is more widespread now.**

I've just read emails from West Papua, reporting that the national dialogue with President Habibie and us will happen on 26th of February. They're in Jayapura now, and 70 people will fly out

**Rumble in the Jungle**  
*Fighting for Freedom in West Papua*

**Worse?!**

Worse, because the large numbers, the numbers of people killed, and the treatment is worse, and also it is never exposed because of the isolation - few people can speak English or get access to the outside world. I am the one person from the Baliem Valley abroad now. No one else.

**And the Baliem Valley is a massive area...?**

Biggest tribe in the island. We have been isolated for so long.

**I am almost surprised to hear you say, and with such certainty, that it's worse than East Timor. Just for me, sitting here, it's so far out of my experience that it's hard to imagine in what way anybody could have had even worse treatment than the East Timorese.**

Like, in my place, one village that was against the Indonesians, they finished the whole village, completely bombed and killed everybody, and no one knows because it is just one valley. We live in mountainous areas and from one valley to another we don't know each other. So we don't know what's happening in the other tribe, and they can just easily finish, and no one will come against - compared to East Timor which is just a small island, people know what's happening in their village, it's just closer to the outside world...

**Because East Timor has a stronger national society than in small tribes?**

And also they have more people educated. They have been with Portugal for 400 years, where West Papua now, we just had contact with in the 1940s and 1960s - in Highlands, '60s. So we don't know how to open our cases. (pause) I saw myself how people were cut into pieces. I saw myself, when I was seven years old, I went with my uncle, my uncle brought me on his shoulders, and they took me down and they cut him in front my eyes, you see...

**What had he done, had he done nothing?**

Because he had a moustache and they were thinking: your hair should be cut short and you must clean this. You must be tidy in



**Rumble in the Jungle**  
*Fighting for Freedom in West Papua*

your clothes, if not, you will be questioned. There is a certain way you must have your hair, how to put on your clothes. If this is not the way they want then you are rebelling.

**So that's really treating you like you're children, basically.**

Yes! Sure. (laughs) The East Timorese, they have knowledge to oppose what's happening by Indonesia, but we don't know. We can't do anything because we are too weak.

**I wanted to try and give people an idea of the natural beauty in West Papua. It seems a remarkably beautiful and rich place - the jungles, mangrove swamps, and the mountains, the birds of paradise, the tree kangaroos, the cassowaries and so on. Can you give people a sense of what this is like and what's being lost as a result of what's going on?**

We have, compared to what I am seeing here, like, many trees, you can see, I don't have any words to describe it, it is natural. We can see birds singing - yes, I can see birds singing here, but not so many. Many, many birds, and plants - people are asking me here 'See this bush', but no, no, this is not bush, this is not natural. I don't have any words, but it is really different here, and I have told people that this is modified world - like food and everything is made modified, this is already modified, and my world is the real world. (Laughs.)

**So even though the villages would be growing their gardens and so on, it's still a very wild landscape. If you were in your home village now what would you see around you?**

Many creatures - particularly in the morning and in the afternoon. Many birds are going to their nests and going out from their nests, and we have special places where we go, for ourselves, when we have finished completing some serious meetings [sounds familiar!], and we go there just to watch the birds coming back in. We know the places where birds go... and it is different. I am here and it is stressful. And I want to go back quickly. People think I would stay here as this is the modern world, but for me personally, I think most of my people at least would agree, my life is more related to the nature, not with this (laughs)

**Rumble in the Jungle**  
*Fighting for Freedom in West Papua*

**Jim Bob! [Jim Bob Moffett, the CEO of Freeport]**

Yes. Bob came to the area, the men didn't say anything, they told the women, 'Go and tell him, because he is from a mother, that's why he is alive, he is Bob because of his mother' - and his mother is more important than his father, based on our culture...

**Sorry, explain that, I suspect that's an important, subtle point...**

Like, if my father and my mother give me advice which is contradictory, I will prefer to listen to my mother, culturally.

**That seems strange to me - the women traditionally have had less input into decision making because their domain is the family, but you, a man, will listen more to your mother than to your father. It seems slightly paradoxical...**

Yes, yes. (much merriment) In public decision-making, gathering opinions, the men are allowed, not women - but these leaders, if they still have their mothers alive, they go and see them for advice. If I tell you the value of advice, actually the mothers have more influence - and the wives also have influence but not as much.

**You were saying that Jim Bob cried when he came to Freeport. I have to say that it's not unknown for business leaders to be hypocritical and to cry what we call crocodile tears [by far the most likely explanation, given Freeport's behaviour before and since the visit] - but people took that as a sincere and meaningful thing, is that right?**

Yes, they did. Bob cried when Yosepha Kwalik, the woman who led the meeting, threw her noken [a woven bag in which Amungme women carry babies and piglets] at him, and said "My son Moffett, in the past I put you inside my noken, I took you with me wherever I went, but I did not realise that you actually suck my blood until it's all drained, and I remain only in bones without flesh. Now I pick you out of my noken and will throw you far away." She asked him to reconsider what he and his company have been doing.



discussions and many consultations, and we have made up our minds in our men's house, and I must go on with that decision - and that means they will do it. We don't say leader actually (laughs), in our language we say someone in front. "Leaders" here have agendas, and it is like they want to influence people for their agendas, but my father is a leader, and I know how he leads. I never see his agenda force other people; he accommodates the agendas from people, he values, he collects agendas, and then examines them. He tells people: 'Your idea is good, but I think this will happen, what do you think about this?' I don't know more about the kingdom system, but it's more like top-down.

## **Women in the Struggle**

**This is another thorny subject, but when you talk about the men's house, I wonder how much input the women have into the decision making process. Do women make their voice known as well?**

Now it is changing, but in general, women almost have no voice in government, in local, traditional government. They have their voice in some certain aspects, like regarding food, how we have guests, how to serve the guests, who will do what, who will contribute this food and on what day and these kind of things - how to distribute foods when we have great feasts, how to divide the food into groups. In the case of food, delivery, family business, women have power, we listen to women, but not about the government, about fighting.

**Is there any call from the women to have a greater say?**

This week, for the first time they have a conference of women in West Papua. Women who were raped, who were treated badly during the wars, when the army take them to their bars, and those women who have gathered together, now they are speaking out for themselves, saying 'Now, we want to be heard.' It has happened from the last two years, when we had protest against the mining companies, when the president of Freeport came...

kind of world. We know the characteristics of different species from our ancestors, for example that that is an important tree. This is passed on through the story holder. My father is one of the story holders. And they tell stories, and we know where we can go and where we cannot go.

**Why can you go to one place but not to another?**

We believe in spirits, you know, so there are some places where we can have trouble but there are some places that are safe, and to my forest other people cannot go, because that's my forest, my spirit is there and I have my power authority on my own land - and if someone else goes there, he will get lost or get trouble, whatever.

**And the Indonesians and transmigrants just don't fit into this at all - they seem totally alien?**

I said strong word - I said 'killing us', even though they won't say that; they will say we are helping you - but I do think they realise they are killing us.

**What sort of environmental impact has the Indonesian occupation had - like the logging, the oil palm plantations, the Trans-Irian Highway [built along the border with Papua New Guinea, to control the region and open it up for resource extraction], the Mamberamo Dam and so on. Does this make it difficult to carry on the original way of life if the forest is going, and the animals are being chased away?**

That's right. We feel that these policies are hurting us and we are fighting back. Actually the basic idea was to preserve the life - it is our life that we want to preserve. We don't want any policy which comes from outside and changes everything. All people are working to defend the culture, the survival of the people, and they mostly fight with the companies - they kidnapped some of the logging companies. Then they took hostage people who were with the World Wildlife Fund because they thought they were from the mining company; that they had sent these people to do surveys, to expand the mining activities. And they said 'We don't want it - it's something we are fighting against, we are fighting to



**Rumble in the Jungle**  
*Fighting for Freedom in West Papua*

close this mining company.' After that they realise that this is not someone here to exploit this land, but that they want to preserve the land, and they say 'Oh no, there is something wrong here,' but it has already happened.

**When they do that sort of thing against, say, representatives of Freeport [the biggest mining company involved in West Papua] does it have the desired effect; does it get them to actually change their ways?**

Yes, that's a big problem now, because we are defending our traditional ways. In West Papua we have two kinds of communities - one is called kingdom, like here, we have small kingdoms, where people listen to one king and it is inherited by his children or brother. But there are also people who live in military communities - meaning that we live like the military, under strong discipline. And we choose our people for leadership and their command because of their skill in fighting. The kingdom is inherited, but the military is elected. And in these military tribes, they are fighting in their own way - and we don't know how to fight better in this modern world. We are just fighting back traditionally, for this is our way to disagree. In my culture, to disagree is to fight; that's what I can do, because that's what I know. And people here from this world say that this is guerrilla fighters, terrorist groups or whatever; from here, I can see myself in that situation. And that is a good lesson I am learning. That's our only way - fighting - our way of disagreeing things. Not the way that this world wants or approves.

**Presumably that means that in fighting the traditional way you are often fighting with the traditional tools, like spears or bows and arrows, is that right?**

Yes.

**So you're up against the Indonesian Army...**

Yes. (laughs)

**With its helicopters, and guns, and...**

Jet fighters. (laughs)

**Rumble in the Jungle**  
*Fighting for Freedom in West Papua*

we want to fight, but then after we get it, what would we do?' We will have another war between the tribes, between the government, and be just like PNG, because this is one island and this is going to be our problem as well. My tribe is the biggest tribe in the island, and people on the coasts are thinking, 'Oh, maybe this tribe will become authoritative.'

**Like situations you have in Nigeria, say, where one tribe monopolises government.**

And this is one thing that is in the future, after I go back - we must sit and talk between the academics, between the politicians, among the West Papuans ourselves, we want to clarify this, set up this before...

**Do the ordinary people have the same input into this sort of discussion process?**

Our tribal leaders, particularly in this year now, are standing in front of the government saying that they want to defend us, which has not happened before, but now they are planning it: 'I am tribal leader, I want my people free, free from you,' and I want that to go on, for them to speak for the people, not politicians, not educated people or whatever.

**Do tribal leaders make the decisions for themselves, or with lots of input from the rest of the tribe - because I can see how they might not respect the wishes of the tribe as much as they should, not pay as much attention.**

There is a trouble in the kingdom system of leadership, mostly on the coast - they don't care about people, but the people are still loyal to their king. But in the Highlands, they elect people based on what they do, and they can be set down in just a day.

**So they can be brought down in a day if they've annoyed people too much, so they've got to be quite careful!**

They must do much consultation - they can't force people to do things. If I were tribal leader, I must be convinced, I must have assurance, that my people will do what I'm saying. I must be sure that they are in agreement, and we have the proof in our tribal



**Rumble in the Jungle**  
*Fighting for Freedom in West Papua*

can't stay underground anymore - it's come above ground - now everybody is claiming, 'I am for freedom, openness.'

**What is the OPM vision for a free West Papua? How would the people like to live free of the Indonesians? I assume that it would be independent of Papua New Guinea. PNG hasn't had the occupation or anything like that, but does have serious problems, say with Bougainville, the illegal [and legal!] logging, government corruption and so on. I was just wondering how you might manage to avoid repeating those mistakes. It would be great to have the Indonesians gone, but what follows?**

We have been talking about this because this question came from many people. They say you want the Indonesians out, but you will still have another government. Government is the same, whatever government it is, they do the same thing.

**There is that problem!**

Yes! Because the government wants to always allow companies in, contracts, and mining companies. My view - and I think most of my people from the Highlands would agree with me - is to come back to the traditions, that's what we would like to promote, where every tribe has their own leadership, it is governed by a council of acknowledged tribal leaders. I have read a book on government in Switzerland and it was a good example, how they made their country, where local leadership is strong, that's the most effective.

**Post-Suharto, Indonesia is talking about devolving power more down to the local level, and bypassing the provincial level. How do you then avoid repeating the same old problems with corruption, but at a new smaller scale? It's perhaps less of a problem in the traditional tribal set-up, but I can still see temptation, and grounds for corruption, especially if there is lots of money floating around on offer from the corporations and others. It's a difficult question, I know, everybody worries about this.**

We are worrying now, because we ourselves are talking - 'OK,

**Rumble in the Jungle**  
*Fighting for Freedom in West Papua*

**And all sorts. Although it sounds like the OPM experiences a remarkable amount of success considering how the odds are stacked against them; and it seems like that is partly because they know the terrain so well, they know the land, and it is very difficult to track people down in the jungle.**

And also we know how to manipulate - we can work with the land, with nature. We can ask rain to come, it is easy, and we can ask the landlords, I mean, the spirits...

**The landlords? Not these sort of landlords, here in the pub!?**  
Not this kind here. (laughs) No! No! The landlords tell them, send them back to their own camps, and they will do it, they can't find us. I can just walk around the village...

**In English, we might say that it 'bewilders' them.**

Yes. They don't know where to go and they get lost, even though we are just watching them.

**So you're saying you are almost invisible to them.**

Invisible. Because we are with our nature. They know us and we know them, and the nature, and they will help us, for we help them.

**The Indonesians stand out, but you don't. You blend into it.**  
Yes.

**Freeport and Grasberg -  
Multinational Mining Scum in Action**

**What is your impression of the role of foreign companies, because obviously this is very relevant to people in the UK, where a lot of these companies are based. The example that springs to mind immediately is the mining, particularly the Grasberg mine operated by Freeport-McMoran [The world's richest gold mine, and the third biggest copper mine]. Grasberg seems very similar to RTZ's Panguna mine in Papua New Guinea in that Indonesia gets an awful lot of revenue**



**Rumble in the Jungle**  
*Fighting for Freedom in West Papua*

from it, as Papua New Guinea does from Bougainville. I was wondering, what is the significance of Freeport, and since 1995, RTZ [now working with Freeport at Grasberg in a mammoth joint venture]?

In particular Freeport has had a long history, even before West Papua came to be Indonesian. We need help in this case to find out what really happened between the Indonesians and the Dutch and the US, because we think there is a vested interest. And they didn't care about the people, and they didn't care about the environment, they only cared about what they benefit. Like in the Act of Free Choice, no UN representatives were allowed to enter West Papua because Indonesia said 'it's risky now, you can't go,' but at the same time, Freeport people were operating, and this is a question mark.

**Am I right in thinking that Freeport was very close to Suharto [former dictator of Indonesia] as well?**

Yes - Suharto was the commander-in-chief in taking West Papua into Indonesia... There's a lot of money changing hands in all of this. Today we have the Dutch Amro Bank - it has shares in Grasberg. I think it is helping Freeport to develop the new contract now, the second contract, for the extension of another 50 years of exploration. RTZ are also involved. Then there are the Korean logging companies. And most of the logging companies belong to Suharto. He was involved in West Papua through [his infamous timber baron crony] Bob Hasan. And they belong to the Army as well. So, in the logging camps, there is the army.

**The army doing the logging work?**

Yes. So people like the Forest Department cannot do anything because they are civil servants. 'We are Army and we are bringing this, so you cannot say anything, you cannot ask for a letter, permission, or whatever...'

**So that's just pure corruption.**

Pure corruption.

**Can you tell us what effects the Freeport mine has had on the**

**Rumble in the Jungle**  
*Fighting for Freedom in West Papua*

TPM is the name of the armed force, OPM is the civil organisation; just like Sinn Fein and IRA, it's similar. (Laughs.) We are learning now what method the world will listen to us more. We began the traditional way, with fighting, but now let us have a cease-fire and then see who is actually killing the people. The army tells the local villagers, 'That's because of the OPM', although actually, logically, this Indonesian army killed them, but they then point out, 'OPM caused you to die, why do you want to agree with the OPM, let us join and fight them with you.'

**Do they get many takers for that? Do people actually believe it?**

Emotionally, they say 'We want to fight', but culturally they can't; they know that we are fighting for them, and we are fighting for our land, for our culture, for the survival of the community. They know this because we tell the stories to keep this culture widespread, for everybody. They will get the emotion for one, two days, because of the people dying, and the crying, and everything. They will say, 'Oh yes - OPM, that's why we are being killed and we hate them.' But then after some days, they rationalise what's actually happening to them, and there are people telling stories...

**This is like the storykeeper thing, it gets brought into the story cycle...**

Where the men gather together and sleep in one house, they discuss broad topics, including this, and they have arguments, and they come out with conclusions: 'The Indonesians are manipulating the situation, actually the OPM are helping us, they are really fighting for us.'

**The 1984 attack on Jayapura [the West Papuan capital] backfired badly, and lots of the underground networks of OPM sympathisers had to flee from there. Did the OPM recover the strength in its underground networks?**

Now we have problem in the bush, not in the city. The underground is now stronger. It has changed because Suharto has stepped down, and the underground is even more clear now, we



## The OPM and Resistance to Indonesian Rule

We've been talking about things that are quite depressing and downbeat in a lot of ways, but from what I've heard, the West Papuan movement seems to be getting stronger. Could you tell us a little bit about the OPM? Is it true that, as has been said: 'We are all OPM. OPM is in the hearts and minds of every West Papuan?' I was also wondering what you could tell us about the OPM structure and history, how it operates as underground networks in the cities, and as guerrillas in the bush. What is the current state of play between the OPM and the army? I saw that there was a cease-fire between the Indonesians and the OPM units in one part of the territory, so does that signify a certain change as well?

Yes. The first question is about history, right? I think it was started from 1st December 1963, where it was planned. And then, I can say we are because we're Papuan, OPM and West Papuan is the same. That from West Papua, we are just the same, even though in front of the government officials, people will say 'I am not OPM, no.' But if you go to them in their house, they will talk differently, and cry in front of you that they are suffering because of their people, and that they feel 'OPM is for us.' We think getting a position in Indonesia is important - when we get a position we can talk, we can do something. We cannot say in front of the people, 'I'm against it,' because we want to be in the government, and know more about what's happening in there, and then we can work for our people.

**So there are people who are gaining influence or working undercover in the colonial power structure, but are there still people out in the jungle carrying out armed operations?**

Yes. Kelly Kwalik, who took the hostages, is actually the regional commander in Freeport's area, he is responsible for the fight against it, and there is another leader, Matthias Wenda - he is commander in chief. And they are basically fighting for rights and survival and these issues we are talking about. About the cease-fire - actually that can happen because I am here. It has just happened because we understand more now how we can do that.

**local people?**

There are five tribes around the mining area. They are moved first - we say translocated, which is just the same as transmigration. In particular the Amungme has the land where Freeport is based; Tembagapura town [Freeport's 'company town'] is where the Amungme come from, where they live. They are crying, shouting, speaking out, telling stories about how they relate to that mountain, that land, that this is what you are doing, this is what you are destroying in this way. People die and suffer from diseases because their world has changed, psychologically actually they suffer. There are many psychological problems that have never been cured up to now.

**Because they've been wrenched away, if you like.**

Yes.

**Isn't one of the OPM leaders from that area originally - what's his name?**

Yes, Kelly Kwalik, who took the WWF hostages, he was from there.

**And he's taken actions against the mine, because he comes from there... It's a gold as well as a copper mine - presumably that means you get a lot of pollution from the mine itself, like mercury and so on. Is the quality of the rivers suffering as a result, as has happened on the Amazon, and people are less able to use it?**

Yes, it's true. Culturally, we don't boil water to drink; we can just drink. We know what river we can drink directly, and some of those are polluted now; and we also fish on the rivers. In 1990, in the mid-1980s, there were people dying because of drinking the water. They didn't know; they hadn't experienced this before. They were just crossing the river, and they drink, and they died. And it was in the local newspaper but nothing happened afterwards, no response from the government over it.

**So no clean up.**

No. If you go to Freeport, before you land you can see the waste



**Rumble in the Jungle**  
*Fighting for Freedom in West Papua*

of the company - rivers come down amidst dirt, dirt river, because of the waste running off it, and you can see many plants dry out and you almost cannot see any living plants. And it's dry. Hectares of... you can see a big strip of destruction alongside the river, from the airplane.

**If the spirits are in the land, how is it viewed in the traditional beliefs if a huge great crater is being dug out of the land?**

They, especially the tribal leaders, they cry, just like children, you know, because they feel that they are being killed. We have houses for men where we gather together, and we talk, we discuss, and the elders tell stories: 'this is actually what it should be, now it's changing,' and they cry. By that way they tell the younger generation what is happening. Like my father tells stories - and they give us advice, 'do this, don't do this,' and when they tell these stories, they cry. But that's what they can do; they can't do anything else. (pause) The reason the government gives is that it is going to help you, develop you - because you are primitive, left behind.

**Assuming that people wanted jobs in the mine anyway, is it not true that very few of them go to West Papuans; it's mainly a thing for foreigners or Indonesians?**

True. Because I can say only 20% are West Papuans working there.

**And what sort of jobs are they doing?**

This 20% are only going underground - not sitting in the office.

**Right, they're doing the dirty work.**

Yes. Up to now, I can say only one person from the tribes is working, sitting in front of a computer in the office, with a tie and everything. But for those who are in the ground, it is risky work. They can die and it doesn't matter; you have signed the contract.

**Is it true that Tembagapura is an incredibly luxurious place,**

**Rumble in the Jungle**  
*Fighting for Freedom in West Papua*

**with a Sheraton hotel, golf course, helicopter pads and all this other stuff as well? It just seems really out of place...**

It's sad. I go there, I cry, because from that luxury world you can see its real owners walking round in traditional dress. I am from there, and when I see my people, just in the airport, it is very, very, very insulting and sad. They look down on us there - as if to say 'Who are you?' They will ask you that if you go to the airport or the hotel - they don't want you there, because you are disturbing the place. There are some families who we work for - I can call that a form of slavery actually. They just pay you back with rice. Because their reason is 'you don't have rice,' that's the rationale. 'You don't have rice here, you don't eat as much fish as we do, because we have companies and we have police and we can feed you - but you need to work here, cut the grass, clean the yards, the whole day you can work here, and do everything we want you to do, and then at the lunchtime come and have rice.' That's how we get paid.

**But isn't there plenty of food that you could grow anyway, or you could find in the forest?**

We have sweet potatoes, but not rice.

**And rice is seen as better?**

Yes, that's what happens now. And local people see all this rice, that it makes these people rich, cars and everything. This is food for this class of people.

**It's almost like it is power to have that sort of food.**

Yes. Food is like identity; who that person is.

**So that's why they work there rather than eating the food from the jungle?**

That's right. Crazy, isn't it?! (laughs)