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# Documentary records continuing independence struggle in West Papua

*The War Next Door*, reported by Sally Sara. Foreign Correspondent. Australian Broadcasting Corporation. Broadcast: 12 May 2020. 30 minutes. <https://www.abc.net.au/foreign/the-war-next-door/12239998>

WE GOT to keep on pushing forward,' sings the band *Sorong Samarai*, which means from the tip of West Papua, Sorong, to Samarai, the island which lies at the eastern tip of mainland Papua New Guinea, 'One people, one soul, one destiny.'

The reggae tune echoes across a festival field in Port Moresby where a crowd has gathered to celebrate the *Morning Star* flag, West Papua's symbol of independence.

It's a message of hope mixed with despair that keeps on resonating throughout the ABC *Foreign Correspondent* documentary *The War Next Door*. It aired in the wake of months of escalating violence and unrest in Indonesian-controlled West Papua.

'Before independence we will kill. We will fight. Continue to fight. No compromise,' a former political prisoner and spokesperson for the armed wing of the West Papuan independence

movement tells *Foreign Correspondent* reporter Sally Sara.

Media are banned from entering West Papua, but the ABC collaborated with West Papuan newspaper editor Victor Mambor to provide the world with a rare glimpse inside the country's struggle for independence.

It's 'the story Indonesia doesn't want the world to know'. It's the story of the death of more than 100,000 West Papuans since the former Dutch New Guinea became officially part of Indonesia in 1969 following a sham referendum.

It is also the story of torture, human rights abuses, racism and political repression.

'I think it is very important for the world to know what happened in West Papua, because human rights abuse happen every day and in every place,' says Mambor.

In December 2018, tensions boiled over when young West Papuan independence fighters killed at least 16 Indonesian road workers building the controversial 4300 km Trans-Papuan Highway through the country's central highlands. Retaliation by Indonesia's security forces, was swift and brutal, causing a humanitarian disaster. More than 40,000 West Papuans were displaced and hundreds killed. Footage obtained by *Foreign Correspondent* shows houses burned to the ground and abandoned villages.

Late last year, more violence erupted, sparked by the racist abuse of a group of West Papuan students, followed by mass protests and more deaths.



**Figure 1: Ronny Kareni wears the colours of the Morning Star flag, the symbol of West Papua independence movement.**

‘All the people of West Papua worry about their lives. There is no future for people of West Papua today,’ says a leader of West Papua’s civil resistance.

He is Indonesia’s most wanted activist and has illegally made his way across the border in the early hours of the morning to meet with *Foreign Correspondent* in a safe house.

Asylum seekers who fled last year’s violence are housed in a camp on the outskirts of the border town of Kiunga in Papua New Guinea’s Western Province while they wait to be processed. However, the stories of these refugees will remain untold as, despite approval from the Prime Minister’s office, local officials refuse to allow the ABC crew into the camp in order to protect their relationship with the Indonesian government. The ABC’s footage of the refugees in the camp’s courtyard is the first to get out into the world.

There are already up to 8000 West Papuans living in refugee villages along the border. They first started arriving in 1960 after West Papua was handed over to Indonesia by the Dutch, followed by another mass exodus of refugees in 1969 after the referendum, and again in 1984 after political unrest. Despite poverty, lack of healthcare and education, the generation of refugees which grew up on the banks of the Fly River is determined to stay and keep on fighting: ‘The only dream that we have is to fight for our freedom.’

Much further north, in the nearby coastal town of Vanimo, in Papua New Guinea’s Sandaun Province, West Papuan refugees, torn from their families and home by the border, are stuck in limbo.

‘Just because we are black and happen to be Melanesians, and we don’t have tanks, we don’t have fighter jets,

you forget that there are people on this island suffering,' says a West Papuan human rights and environmental activist. 'Something has to be done.'

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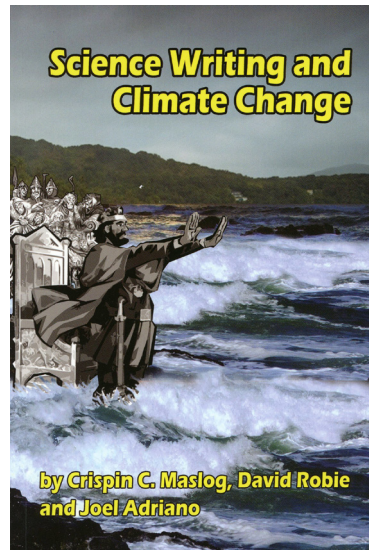
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