

HRM Annual Report

Human rights and conflict in West Papua 2023

Executive Summary

West Papua in 2023 faced a significantly worse human rights situation compared to the rest of Indonesia. Decades of unresolved conflict have further escalated since December 2018, leading to a surge in extrajudicial killings, disappearances, and torture by security forces, particularly in the highlands. Freedom of expression remained restricted, with authorities continuing to disperse peaceful protests.

The government's focus on infrastructure projects and resource extraction continued, with minimal benefits for indigenous Papuans. Special autonomy funds provided little improvement to healthcare and education, especially in conflict zones where facilities remained devastated. Military personnel, increasingly deployed to West Papua, were sometimes tasked with filling gaps, often ineffectively, in healthcare and education due to a personnel exodus triggered by the violence.

Over 76,000 Papuans remained internally displaced as of 2023 due to armed clashes or security force raids that destroyed their homes and livestock. Fear of returning home due to heavy military presence kept them in displacement camps, often lacking basic services.

March 2024

1. Civil and Political Rights

Impunity



Fig. 1: On 05 September 2023, a panel of Military Oditur III-13 Denpasar judges acquitted Sergeant Vicente De Oliara and Private Bahari Muhrim of their charges.

Impunity remains a major obstacle to stopping human rights abuses in West Papua. While there are a few cases where police or military faced punishment, these are rare compared to the many incidents of torture, killings, and disappearances. Courts mostly don't hold perpetrators accountable in public trials. Police investigations lack transparency, and neither military courts nor police procedures offer

proper compensation to victims. Apart from a [few positive examples](#), most perpetrators received sentences that were disproportionately lenient concerning the severity of the crime.

For example, in September 2023, [two soldiers who admitted to killing Papuans in Mimika Regency were acquitted by a military court](#). The court claimed the soldiers acted in "self-defence," highlighting the serious problem of accountability in West Papua.

Killings and Torture

Extrajudicial killings have surged since 2019, with cases and victims reaching a peak of 37 in 2023 (see Table 1). This is linked to the escalating conflict and [security force raids targeting the West Papua National Liberation Army \(TPNPB\)](#). [Disappearances](#) during these raids raise further concerns. Additionally, human rights defenders reported a [rise in cases of civil unrest in 2023](#), in which security forces killed multiple people in a single incident. Worryingly, most of these outbreaks of unrest also involved "horizontal violence" – [clashes between indigenous Papuans and non-Papuans](#). This highlights the growing potential for ethnic conflict fueled by social tensions and racial discrimination in West Papua. The [most recent and violent example](#) of this pattern occurred in Sinakma Village, Wamena Town, in February 2023. Here, eleven people died – two migrants and nine indigenous Papuans – either directly from security force actions or during subsequent ethnic clashes. Forty-seven indigenous Papuans were also injured by gunfire. The potential for genocide has already been highlighted by a [report from the Simon-Skjoldt Center for the Prevention of Genocide](#) in 2022.

Moreover, in July 2023, the UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, in her [opening remarks during the 22nd Meeting](#) of the 53rd Regular Session of the Human Rights Council expressed concerns regarding the human rights situation in the Papuan provinces. She encouraged early action at community, national, regional, and international levels on the warning signs and remarked that "prevention of genocide and related crimes is closely linked to ensuring accountability. Failing to hold perpetrators accountable and allowing impunity to take hold increases the risk of future genocides."



Fig. 2: Villagers and a church worker carry the body of Mr Yusak Sondegau. He was shot dead by security force members during a raid in the Jalai Village, Intan Jaya Regency, on 21 January 2024

Similar to extrajudicial killings, the widespread use of torture and ill-treatment by security forces, particularly police, is closely linked to the problem of impunity. Perpetrators rarely face public trials in civil courts. Human rights training programs for the police and military seem ineffective as long as perpetrators receive lenient sentences or internal disciplinary sanctions behind closed doors. The overall statistics on torture cases and victims haven't shown any decrease throughout the past decade, with annual cases remaining constant with minor fluctuations. This grim reality suggests that torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment

remain widespread practices by the police and military in West Papua.

Freedom of Expression

Several articles in Indonesia's Criminal Code (KUHP) continue to severely restrict freedom of expression. These include laws on incitement, defamation, attacking someone's reputation, and treason. Articles 106 and 110 of the KUHP, specifically targeting treason and conspiracy against the state, are frequently used to silence Papuan voices.

While treason charges have declined slightly over the past decade, the high number in 2019 (86) shows their use to suppress political activity. This year coincided with the "Papua Uprising," triggered by racist attacks against Papuan students. Since then, authorities have shifted to charges like assault and theft to target Papuans expressing political views.



Fig. 3: Peaceful protest in commemoration of the Human Rights Day in the town of Manokwari on 10 December 2023

Police routinely restrict peaceful assemblies for Papuans and solidarity groups, both in West Papua and elsewhere in Indonesia, particularly when protests raise issues like self-determination, human rights abuses, militarisation, or racial discrimination. The [Papuan Student Alliance \(AMP\)](#) and the [Indonesian People's Front for West Papua \(FRI WP\)](#) are groups outside of West Papua that are often targeted.

Repression by law enforcement and nationalist groups (Organisasi Kemasyarakatan or ORMAS) has increased over the past five years. [Police repeatedly fail to protect pro-Papuan protesters](#) from violence by these groups.

Although statistics show fewer dispersed assemblies in 2023 (see Table 1), this doesn't reflect a growing space for expression. [Police forces cracked down on peaceful protests on Human Rights Day](#), arbitrarily [detained persons distributing leaflets for peaceful rallies](#), and [intimidated groups holding gatherings or worship ceremonies on private property](#). Every political protest is heavily monitored. The decline in dispersed assemblies likely reflects a shrinking space for expression, with the police preventing the assemblies from taking place, leading to fewer public demonstrations.



Fig. 4: Papuans carrying out peaceful protests related to the New York Agreement in Sentani, Jayapura Regency, on 15 August 2023

[Arrests at peaceful assemblies are sometimes accompanied by violence](#), and arbitrary arrests are used to prevent people from expressing their opinions. Though most are released without charges, this violates their right to peaceful assembly. Organisations like the West Papua National Committee (KNPB) and the [United Liberation Movement for West Papua \(ULMWP\)](#) faced [repression](#), [violence](#), and [prosecution](#) throughout 2023.

Table 1: Statistical table on civil and political rights violations in West Papua between 2019 and 2023

Data on civil and political rights in West Papua	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Nr. of reported torture/ill-treatment cases*	22	34	N/A	46	39
Nr. of reported torture/ill-treatment victims*	126	89	69	223	160+
Nr. of reported cases of extra-judicial killings	16	16	N/A	14	17
Nr. of reported victims of extra-judicial killings	33	25	17	18	42
Nr. of reported cases of enforced disappearances	2	2	N/A	3	2
Nr. of reported victims of enforced disappearances	6	4	4	6	3
Nr. of sanctions against perpetrators of police and military	2	2	N/A	13	7
Nr. of political arrests	619	384	585	492	311
Nr. of peaceful demonstrations/assemblies on West Papua issues forcefully intervened by security forces*	38	37	N/A	29	13
Nr. of persons sentenced for treason & criminal conspiracy (Article 106 and/or 110 KUHP)	86	18	N/A	15	10

*include cases/victims of violations against indigenous Papuans and non-Papuan solidarity groups outside West Papua

(+) dozens more besides the documented victims in one or more cases.

Source: HRM Database, compilation from Media sources, NGOs and HRDs

Health

Indigenous Papuans face a stark healthcare disparity compared to the rest of Indonesia, especially Indigenous Papuans living in rural areas, where the availability and accessibility of medical facilities are severely limited. Remote regions often lack proper facilities, with outdated equipment and chronic medication shortages. Doctors are scarce, and concentrated in urban centres, leaving vast

areas underserved. Some regions even entirely lack hospitals, forcing residents to travel long distances for basic care.



Fig. 5: Health Centre in the Suru-Suru District, Yahukimo Regency. Photo taken in August 2023

The ongoing armed conflict further exacerbates the healthcare crisis. In the central highlands, poorly equipped hospitals may serve entire regions, while health centres are frequently abandoned or destroyed due to fighting.

Government efforts over the past years haven't significantly improved access, especially in rural areas where most Papuans live. Though statistics show an increase in the number of hospitals, many regencies still lack basic facilities. As of 2021, 20 hospitals were available in the Papua Barat Province, and 52 hospitals

were in the Papua Province. Six regencies in both provinces still do not have any public hospitals.

Table 2: Combined table on health facilities for the provinces Papua and Papua Barat based on the data published by the Provincial Statistical Centres BPS Papua and BPS Papua Barat between 2014 and 2023

Papua Province	2014	2018	2019	2020	2021
Hospitals	43	41	46	45	52
Maternity Hospitals	10	1	2	1	2
Polyclinics	154	115	109	95	83
Health Centres (Puskesmas)	386	422	439	450	447
Subsidiary Healths Centres (Puskesmas Pembantu)	983	1.146	1.088	1.146	1.041
Papua Barat Province					
Hospitals	14	16	16	19	20
Maternity Hospitals	2	0	0	0	0
Polyclinics	30	29	28	32	25
Health Centres (Puskesmas)	144	177	182	196	179
Subsidiary Healths Centres (Puskesmas Pembantu)	434	495	427	419	402
West Papua					
Hospitals	57	57	62	64	72
Maternity Hospitals	12	1	2	1	2
Polyclinics	184	144	137	127	108
Health Centres (Puskesmas)	530	599	621	646	626
Subsidiary Healths Centres (Puskesmas Pembantu)	1.417	1.641	1.709	1.792	1.667

The low number of hospitals that only exist in urban settlements implies that West Papua's healthcare system heavily relies on other medical institutions. The latest statistics available, dating 2021, indicate a negative trend in the availability of polyclinics, maternity hospitals, health and subsidiary health centres. A particularly worrying trend is the decline in maternity hospitals, dropping from 12 in 2014 to only 2 in 2021. This has a direct impact on maternal and child health

outcomes, as over 23% of women in West Papua give birth without medical support.¹ Specific regencies report even more alarming figures, with over half of women lacking access to birthing assistance. These disparities contribute to higher mortality rates for mothers and newborns.

Table 3: Combined table on birth attendance for the provinces Papua and Papua Barat based on the data published by the Provincial Statistical Centres BPS Papua and BPS Papua Barat between 2014 and 2023

Birth attended by (in %):	2018	2019	2020	2021
Papua Province				
Doctor	18,87	21,17	22,45	20,71
Midwife	38,02	42,51	40,87	46,47
Other medical personnel	16,92	5,73	5,17	5,75
Traditional birth attendant	23,72	13,49	12,57	12,25
Other or no birth attendance	2,47	15,55	18,94	14,82
West Papua Province				
Doctor	28,31	33,59	33,47	34,24
Midwife	52,76	47,67	47,41	44,33
Other medical personnel	1,55	12,90	1,89	1,95
Traditional birth attendant	10,36	5,55	10,72	13,08
Other or no birth attendance	7,02	0,28	6,51	6,41
West Papua				
Doctor	23,59	27,38	27,96	27,48
Midwife	45,39	45,09	44,14	45,40
Other medical personnel	9,24	9,32	3,53	3,85
Traditional birth attendant	17,04	9,52	11,65	12,67
Other or no birth attendance	4,75	7,92	12,73	10,62

The government's attempt to address the healthcare gap by deploying military personnel raises concerns. While they do to certain extent support a constrained provision of medical services in both conflict and neighbouring non-conflict areas, their presence raises fear among Papuans due to past human rights violations and prevents them from accessing the limited services.

Beyond availability, the quality of care is another major concern. Statistics may show healthcare facilities exist, but they often lack essential resources. Most rural health centres lack medical specialists, forcing residents to travel long distances for even basic care. Government statistics on medical staff in health centres (Puskesmas) are contradictory. Papua province supposedly lacks specialists, while Papua Barat lacks general practitioners. These inconsistencies raise concerns about data accuracy.

¹ Based on data published by the Provincial Statistical Centres BPS Papua and BPS Papua Barat between 2014 and 2023. For some regencies, there is no data available.



Fig. 6: Armed military members supervising the provision of medical services in the Papuan Highlands April 2023

Administrative negligence adds another layer of disruption to healthcare access. Delayed salary payments for health workers and medication shortages are frequent occurrences, leading to the closures of hospitals and health centres. [Nduga hospital and Kenyam health centre closed due to unpaid staff](#). [Poor management in Waghete Hospital](#) led to medication shortages. Human rights defenders claim the shortage could have been avoided with better coordination.

Over 76,000 internally displaced Papuans face a health crisis. Displacement has been ongoing since the conflict in West Papua intensified in early 2019 and internally displaced persons (IDPs) since then have not had access to proper healthcare. Women and children are especially vulnerable. Long distances, transportation costs, and lack of legal documents create additional barriers to accessing medical treatment. Displaced children often show signs of malnutrition and respiratory issues, while pregnant women and the elderly face similar challenges. The lack of healthcare access contributes to a [higher mortality rate](#) among IDPs.



Fig. 7: Armed military members patrolling the health centre in the Sinak District, Puncak Regency, July 2023

Compounding the problem is the government's continued disregard for IDPs. Their lack of legal status prevents them from accessing humanitarian aid from national and international organisations, leaving them further isolated and vulnerable.

Education



Fig. 8: TNI member teaching mathematics in a school in Keerom Regency in September 2023

West Papua faces a hidden education crisis. Government statistics show increased teacher numbers and facilities, but civil society doubts their accuracy due to quick variations like an increase of almost 100% in pupil-teacher (PTR) in 2023 compared to 2022. Moreover, underlying issues like high teacher absenteeism, low education quality, and devastated school infrastructure persist even in urban areas. Literacy rates expose long-term failures. Papua Province has Indonesia's lowest rate at 84.22% (2023), far below the national average

(96.53%) and neighbouring Papua Barat (97.84%). Rural areas, predominantly indigenous, are most affected by this educational disparity.

The armed conflict in West Papua has a devastating impact on education, particularly for the children among the over 76,000 internally displaced Papuans.² In conflict zones like Pegunungan Bintang, Yahukimo, Puncak, Nduga, Maybrat, and Intan Jaya, schools lie abandoned, and teachers have fled for fear of violence.



Fig. 9: TNI members visit a Junior High school in the Tolikara Regency, in April 2023

The conflict's effects spill over into neighbouring regions. Military presence disrupts education even in areas not directly involved in fighting. Compounding this issue is a recent government policy, announced in November 2021 by Mahfud MD, the coordinating minister for political, legal, and security affairs. This policy encourages military personnel to directly engage in community matters, including acting as educators in conflict-affected areas.

However, this approach raises serious concerns. Many indigenous Papuan children are deeply traumatised by generations of human rights abuses, and the presence of military personnel in schools only adds to their fear. Additionally, schools with a military presence become potential targets for attacks by the TPNPB.

The situation is particularly alarming in the Greater East Aifat and South Aifat areas of Maybrat Regency, where at least ten elementary schools and one junior high school stand abandoned. Several school buildings, including the YPPK Faan Kahrio Elementary School, YPPK Michael Elementary School, YPPK Elementary School (Ayata Village), and a junior high school building in the Aifat Timur Tengah District, have been repurposed as temporary posts for the TNI (Indonesian National Armed Forces) and Police Mobile Brigade (Brimob).



Fig. 10: The YPPK Kahrio Elementary School in the in Faan Kahrio Village, Maybrat Regency, was turned into a military post

² Human Rights Monitor (6.10.2023): IDP Update, October 2023: recent displacement in Yahukimo, Pegunungan Bintang and Fakfak Regencies, available at: <https://humanrightsmonitor.org/news/idp-update-october-2023-recent-displacement-in-yahukimo-pegunungan-bintang-and-fakfak-regencies/>

2. Conflict and Displacement

Armed Conflict

The Indonesian government has, as in previous years, sought to maintain control over resource-rich, sparsely populated West Papua. This strategy involved increased security presence, administrative divisions, and economic development initiatives. However, the situation deteriorated significantly in 2023.

Data collected by HRM revealed a significant rise in armed attacks from 64 in 2020 to a peak of 107 in 2023. Civilian casualties also reached a new high of 62 in 2023, compared to 27 in 2020. Security forces suffered increased casualties as well in 2023 (See table 4). However, these numbers might be underestimates. [Public data from the Indonesian National Police \(Polri\)](#) reports a total of 199 attacks in 2023. While this figure suggests a decrease compared to 2022 (234 attacks reported by Polri), it contradicts the upward trend identified by the HRM data.

Table 4: Armed conflict in West Papua between 2018 and 2023

Armed violence in West Papua	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Number of armed attacks	44	33	64	85	72	110
Number of casualties among security forces	8	18	11	18	19	57
Number of injured security forces	15	12	10	34	29	41
Number of casualties among TPNPB fighters	12	14	14	24	8	18
Number of injured TPNPB fighters	4	0	1	8	1	7
Total number of fatalities among civilians during armed clashes or raids	42	20	27	28	43	63
Number of civilians killed by security force members ³	17	13	20	12	5	23
Number of civilians killed by TPNPB fighters	25	7	7	14	38	40
Total number of injured civilians	15	9	27	20	21	57
Number of civilians injured by security force members	7	9	10	7	2	23
Number of civilians injured by TPNPB fighters	8	0	16	13	19	34

Source: HRM Documentation and Database, the data was compiled from media sources, TPNPB press releases, and information submitted by a network of human rights defenders in West Papua

The conflict extended into and intensified in new regencies in Papua Barat province and the central highlands. In 2023, Intan Jaya and Puncak witnessed the most attacks (24 and 22 respectively). Maybrat also saw a rise in violence compared to previous years. Lower-intensity conflict persisted in Nabire, Teluk Bintuni, Puncak Jaya, and Lanny Jaya.

³ The figure is composed of civilians killed during armed clashes and security force raids, as well as civilians assassinated by TPNPB members in targeted attacks.

Beyond the rising numbers, reports raise serious concerns about the tactics employed. Security operations in the central highlands, particularly in Intan Jaya and Puncak (which saw the most attacks in 2023), allegedly involved the deliberate destruction of houses and livestock. This strategy appears aimed at disrupting the guerilla fighters who rely on local villages for supplies. However, the presence of combatants among civilians doesn't justify indiscriminate attacks against civilian settlements.



Fig. 11: War drone captured by TPNPB Members in the Intan Jaya Regency in January 2024

The use of air raids against small villages raises even graver concerns. These tactics make it impossible to guarantee the separation of civilians and combatants, potentially violating international law and constituting crimes against humanity. Human rights groups have documented instances of such attacks, including the use of combat drones (see photo), in [Intan Jaya in April 2023](#),

in [Yahukimo in August 2023](#), in [Puncak in August 2023](#), and in [Nduga in September 2023](#). These attacks reportedly involved drone strikes with mortar grenades targeting civilian homes, forcing residents to flee for their lives into the surrounding forests. Security forces are further accused of burning houses to the ground and firing indiscriminately, resulting in civilian casualties. Additionally, villagers were subjected to arbitrary arrests and torture during interrogations. In Intan Jaya, reports allege the [disappearances of executed victims](#).

Internal Displacement

Since December 2018, a surge in armed conflict across West Papua has forced over 76,228 people (see table below) – primarily indigenous Papuans – to flee their homes. Fear of continued violence prevents their return, creating a growing humanitarian crisis.

Displaced people have sought refuge in safer regencies and cities across West Papua, often arriving with nothing but the clothes on their backs. The conflict forced them to abandon their belongings and left them disconnected from basic government services, including education.



Fig. 12: IDPs from the Serambakon District, Pegunungan Bintang Regency, hide in the forest after armed clashes on 18 September 2023

Living conditions for these internally displaced persons (IDPs) vary greatly. Some find refuge with relatives, while others rent rooms in cities or build makeshift shelters in the jungle. A common thread, however, is the struggle for basic supplies.



Fig. 13: IDPs from the Fak Fak Regency hiding in the jungle after security forces intensified patrols in September 2023.

The Indonesian government, despite documented evidence of conflict-induced displacement since December 2018, continues to deny the existence of over 70,000 IDPs in West Papua. Furthermore, they lack a comprehensive strategy to address the critical needs of these displaced people, including access to education and healthcare.

This situation is particularly challenging for children. Many IDPs have fled to urban settlements where overcrowded shelters lack basic

amenities like electricity. Parents often lack the financial means to afford school supplies, further hindering their children's education. The influx of IDP children also strains resources in their new schools. Some children experience trauma from fleeing their villages, making the already difficult task of learning even more challenging. Unfortunately, government agencies appear to be turning a blind eye to the educational challenges faced by IDPs and their children.

Table 5: IDPs across West Papua, Indonesia, as of September 2023

Regency	No IDPs	Displaced since	Additional info
Nduga	56,981[1]	4 Dec. 18	IDPs originate from 11 districts in Nduga; more than 615 IDPs reportedly died as of January 2022
Puncak	2,724[2]	27 Apr. 21	at least 16 IDPs have reportedly died during displacement
Intan Jaya	5,859[3]	26 Oct. 21	at least 126 IDPs face health issues, and 11 IDPs reportedly died
Maybrat	5,296[4]	2 Sep. 21	IDPs originated from 5 districts, 138 IDPs reportedly died, and the local Govt reportedly facilitated the return of several hundred IDPs from nine villages since November 2022
Pegunungan Bintang (Kiwirok District)	2,252[5]	10 Oct. 21	about 200 IDPs fled to PNG, 74 IDPs reportedly died, and dozens of IDPs suffered from sickness
Pegunungan Bintang (Serambakon District)	91[6]	18 Sep. 23	ten persons sick, two women pregnant, 47 children among the IDPs
Yahukimo (Suru-Suru District)	1,971[7]	20 Nov. 21	IDPs from 13 villages sought shelter in 15 temporary camps, 16 women gave birth without medical attention, and 13 IDPs reportedly died.

Regency	No IDPs	Displaced since	Additional info
Yahukimo (Dekai District)	554 [8]	21 Aug. 23	13 persons were sick, one died, two females murdered
Fakfak (Kramongmongga District)	500[9]	16 Aug. 23	N/A
TOTAL	76,228		

[1] Compiled by a group of Papuan human rights defenders that visited IDPs from Nduga in the town of Wamena and surrounding areas between 12 and 20 July 2023

[2] Jubi (9.11.2021): SORAKPATOK: 300 tewas dan 50 ribu warga Papua mengungsi, available at: <https://jubi.co.id/sorakpatok-300-tewas-dan-50-ribu-warga-papua-mengungsi/>

[3] CNN Indonesia (30.10.2021): Ribuan Warga Papua Mengungsi Usai Pecah Kontak Senjata, available at: <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20211030195433-12-714496/ribuan-warga-papua-mengungsi-usai-pecah-kontak-senjata>

[4] Figures published by the National human Rights Commission (Komnas HAM) in July 2023, see Suara Papua (30.07.2023): 5.296 Warga Kabupaten Maybrat Masih Bertahan di Tempat Pengungsian, available at: <https://suarapapua.com/2023/07/30/5-296-warga-kabupaten-maybrat-masih-bertahan-di-tempat-pengungsian/>

[5] Compiled from multiple lists with names of IDPs which local human rights defenders compiled in Pegunungan Bintang between April and July 2023. Church workers updated the number of deaths in July 2023

[6] The number is based on a name list that human rights defenders in Serambakon compiled shortly after the displacements occurred.

[7] The number is based on data compiled by local church workers. The information was received in February 2022

[8] The number is based on a name list that human rights defenders in Dekai compiled in September 2023

[9] Based on an estimation made by local human rights defenders in Kramongmongga in September 2023

About Human Rights Monitor

The Human Rights Monitor (HRM) is an independent, international non-profit project promoting human rights through documentation and advocacy. HRM is based in the European Union and active since 2022. We are achieving our vision by documenting violations; researching institutional, social and political contexts that affect rights protection and peace; and sharing the conclusions of evidence-based monitoring work.

A description of each of the cases of human rights violations mentioned and counted in this report is available at <https://humanrightsmonitor.org/cases>

Contact:

Human Rights Monitor
Friedrich-Ebert-Str. 55
42103 Wuppertal
GERMANY

web: humanrightsmonitor.org
phone: +49 151 59041934
email: hrm@humanrightsmonitor.org



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