

Indonesian police detain eight Papuans over Freeport murders

John Roberts
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Indonesian police, in collaboration with the American FBI, detained 12 people on January 11 in the province of Papua over the murder of two Americans and an Indonesian in August 2002. Four of the arrested Papuans were later released.

Those murdered, three teachers at an international school run by the giant US-operated Freeport gold and copper mine, died when a bus in which they were travelling was ambushed by armed gunmen. Twelve others were injured in the attack.

From the outset, the murders have been surrounded by controversy. The Indonesian government and armed forces (TNI) insisted that separatist fighters from the Free Papua Movement (OPM) were to blame. The OPM, however, denied any involvement. Moreover, evidence emerged indicating the involvement of the TNI, which has a history of running protection rackets and other illegal activities in Papua and other parts of Indonesia.

The ambush, which lasted an estimated 45 minutes, took place within earshot of a TNI checkpoint. Yet even though over 200 rounds were fired, soldiers failed to come to the assistance of the teachers. Shortly after the attack the TNI claimed to have shot dead a Papuan, Danianus Walker, who was involved in the attack. An autopsy revealed, however, that Walker had died at least 24 hours before the ambush took place. Articles in the *Washington Post* and *Sydney Morning Herald* citing US and Australian intelligence sources pointed to the high-level involvement of the Indonesian military.

The ambush threatened to derail the Bush administration's efforts to reestablish close military ties with Indonesia, severed completely in 1999 after the TNI-backed militia violence against independence supporters in East Timor. The US Congress stipulated that Indonesia cooperate with the FBI in solving the murders before funding for military cooperation was approved.

In June 2004, US Attorney General John Ashcroft

indicted alleged OPM rebel Anthonius Wamang for the murders, without however answering any of the outstanding questions surrounding the incident. The OPM issued a statement denying any role in the ambush and pointing out that Wamang had worked closely with the TNI over the previous four years, both in the sandalwood business and as part of a pro-Indonesian militia.

By blaming the attack on Papuan separatists, Ashcroft paved the way for Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to readmit Indonesia to Pentagon's IMET military training program last November.

The latest arrests, which included Wamang, have simply raised more doubts about the case. Through his lawyer, Wamang provided more details pointing to the involvement of the TNI. Lawyer Albert Rumbekwan told the *New York Times* last Friday that, while admitting his involvement in the ambush, Wamang claimed that three men in Indonesian military uniforms were also firing at the vehicles. He repeated a previous claim that Wamang had received ammunition from a senior TNI officer.

Tim Riser, spokesman for US Senator Patrick Leahy, praised the arrests as a development in the case. But he added: "There are so many unanswered questions in this case, including who these people are and what role they may have had in these crimes." Leahy sponsored the Congressional restrictions on US-Indonesia military ties.

The detentions have provoked considerable public anger in Papua. Lawyers and human rights activists have accused the FBI of entrapment. Lawyer Anum Siregar said the men had been lured to the Amole II Hotel in Timika to meet FBI agents. They were told that they were going to the US to be interviewed. "They were promised that once in US custody they could speak freely and that their safety would be guaranteed," he said. Instead the FBI bundled them into a vehicle and turned them over to the police.

"We believed we were going to America," Viktus

Wanmang told the *New York Times*. The men were given 650,000 rupiah or about \$US70 for the trip and came to the hotel with their bags packed to leave. “The car was driven at high speeds. When we stopped, when the car door opened, there was a group of police waiting,” Wanmang said. He and three others were later released.

Police spokesman Brigadier General Anton Bachrul Alam denied that the FBI tricked the men. He claimed that the police learned that the suspects had all gathered at the hotel and swooped.

Those detained include Agustinus Anggaibak, 14, and Yohanes Kasamol, 15, also known as Joni. The two boys were only 9 and 10, respectively, at the time of the attack. Yet they were flown to Jakarta for further interrogation and trial, along with Anthonius Wamang and five others.

Last Saturday hundreds of Papuan protesters in the provincial capital of Jayapura blocked the road to the airport, forcing police to transfer the eight by military helicopter. The protest was organised by the United Front for the Struggle of the West Papuan People, who are demanding that those detained be questioned and tried in the province, rather than Jakarta.

At a press conference in Jakarta, Indonesian Police chief Sutanto told reporters not to “spread rumours” about TNI involvement in the 2002 murders. He claimed that forensic and other evidence as well as confessions proved that the separatist rebels were responsible and no TNI personnel were involved.

However, a lawyer for the arrested men, Aloysius Renwarin, declared: “They are being sacrificed for the relationship between the US and Indonesia.” Certainly the Indonesian government and military would like to see the case buried in order to strengthen closer ties with Washington. Conveniently the latest arrests, aided by the FBI, have provided the means to do that.



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