

Indonesia Country-wide Risk: Low / West Papua Risk: Moderate

While COVID-19 brought risk of violence to minority groups in Indonesia, including Indonesia's Chinese population and recent migrants to the country, such as Rohingya refugees, the risk did not escalate into outbursts of violence.

What has escalated in the country as a result of COVID-19, as reported in the previous Regional Outlook, is a dramatic rise in domestic violence; in some instances, the reporting of the crime doubled from 2019.¹ According to the World Bank East Asia and Pacific Gender Innovation Lab, forty-three per cent of women in rural areas of Indonesia felt unsafe at home, and forty-six per cent felt unsafe in their community due to perceived risks attributed to COVID-19, up dramatically from previous years.² A 2020 survey by the National Commission on the Elimination of Violence against Women noted not only a rise in physical violence, but also a rise in emotional anxiety due to unemployment and the reshaping of traditional collectivist society centred on religion and community. The pandemic has been seen to isolate families, leaving women more vulnerable to abuse by frustrated partners who are having to spend more time at home due to unemployment and social restriction³.

Aside from small outbursts of violence in West Papua, other small outbursts of violence have occurred in the country recently, including the Timor region of East Nusa Tenggara province, where it was reported that women from an indigenous group were beaten by Indonesian police and soldiers in October 2020. According to the report, Indigenous peoples' land was taken, in partnership, by the provincial government and the Australian government for cattle farming in 1984. The Indigenous minority, who claims the land as theirs, has since made a series of protests, resulting in their homes demolished in August 2020.⁴ More recent protests led to bashings by Indonesian officials.

Indonesian social media remains a harbinger of hate speech and disinformation on a range of topics, from COVID anti-vaccination campaigners to hard-right Islamist rhetoric. Microsoft's recently published Digital Civility Index Report suggests that the country's civility, safety and interaction online has declined, and most of this content is driven by adults using social media. The report cites the highest risks to digital civility as being hate speech, hoaxes, and discrimination, with 59 per cent of those interviewed suggesting it is social media's responsibility, not the government's, to curb all three of these problems.⁵

Recommendations

The Indonesian Government should:

1. Appoint a senior official as National R2P Focal Point to coordinate national and international efforts to implement R2P;
2. Ensure restricting the spread of COVID-19 remains a priority;
3. Ensure legislative decisions do not compromise Indonesia's democracy and will not lead to human rights abuse across all regions;
4. Work to implement legislation to stop hate speech and discrimination.

The Australian government should:

1. Encourage Indonesia to take active steps to fulfil its responsibility to protect;
2. Continue to explore avenues for cooperation with the Indonesian government and society in the areas of combatting violent extremism and terrorism, preventing sectarian conflict, and reducing incitement and hate speech;
3. Continue to provide COVID-19 assistance when requested to help the government and civil society tackle challenges that stem from the pandemic;

4. Explore the risk of violent unrest due to ethnic displacement because of the partnership between Indonesian and Australian governments.

West Papua

Risk: Moderate.

The Indonesian military reported that an Indonesian soldier had been killed in West Papua by separatist rebels in February 2021. Insurgents opened fire at an army outpost in Intan Jaya district.⁶ Internet shutdowns have been used as a tool by the Indonesian Government to stymie unrest and protest in West Papua, such as during the 2019 uprising. In 2020, a group of civil society organisations sued the government for the internet shut downs, and the Jakarta State Administrative Court found that these shut downs were illegal.⁷

The racism directed at West Papuans by Indonesian authorities, that triggered the 2019 violence, reared its head again in January 2021, with comments from officials associated with the government. A former head of the Indonesian intelligence agency and special forces said that West Papuans should be resettled in order to “racially separate them from Papuans in PNG”, while a prominent supporter of President Joko Widodo alluded to the longstanding “monkey” slur against Indigenous Papuans.⁸

On 1 December 2020, long-time West Papuan independence activist Benny Wenda was declared President-In-Exile of the Provisional Government of West Papua, by the United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULMWP). However, various West Papuan groups have rejected his presidency, and the independence movement appears to be fragmented and without a broadly accepted leadership.⁹

While underlying tensions about independence, ongoing racism and resource exploitation remain, there is potential for conflict. As long as armed rebels continue to carry out acts of violence against civilians, and while as the Indonesian Government continues to neglect the social and economic needs and aspirations of the West Papuan people, the risk of violence and atrocity crimes remains high.

Recommendations

The Indonesian Government should:

1. Address entrenched racial discrimination, hate speech and incitement against West Papuans, and provide clear advice to security forces to abide by international law and refrain from the use of violence and torture;
2. As a member of the UN Human Rights Council, ensure human rights are protected in all Indonesian territories, including freedom to protest and gather and freedom of speech.
3. Refrain from using racist and inciteful language;
4. Respect and abide by the Court’s decision that the media blackout is unlawful, and in turn make the province accessible to foreign and Indonesian media reporting;
5. Consider the aspirations of West Papuans and the underlying issues fueling the protests, and endeavour to take into account these aspirations in future dealings with the province.

¹ Ardila Syakriah, ‘Coronavirus Pandemic Leads to Rise in Domestic Violence Cases in Indonesia,’ *Jakarta Post*, January 13, 2021, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/paper/2021/01/12/coronavirus-pandemic-leads-to-rise-in-domestic-violence-cases-in-indonesia.html>

² Elizaveta Perova, Daniel Halim and Diana J. Arango, 'Measuring and Understanding Gender-Based Violence in Indonesia Amid COVID-19 Pandemic,' *World Bank . . . Blogs*, December 16, 2020, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/eastasiapacific/measuring-and-understanding-gender-based-violence-indonesia-amid-covid-19-pandemic>

³ Wulan Danoekoesoemo, 'Not all Houses are Homes: Domestic Violence in Indonesia During COVID-19,' *BINUS University Blog*, January 6, 2021, <https://bbs.binus.ac.id/international-business/2021/01/not-all-houses-are-homes-domestic-violence-in-indonesia-during-covid-19/>

⁴ Ryan Dagur, 'Violence Flares as Indonesian Land Dispute Hots Up,' *UCA News*, October 22, 2020, <https://www.ucanews.com/news/violence-flares-as-indonesian-land-dispute-hots-up/89972#>

⁵ Anon., 'Civility, Safety and Interaction Online: Indonesia,' *Microsoft.com/SaferOnline*, 2021, https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/digital-skills/digital-civility?activetab=dc_i_reports%3aprimar4

⁶ Anon., 'Suspected Rebels Kill Soldier in Papua,' *AAP*, February 15, 2021, <https://thewest.com.au/news/conflict/suspected-rebels-kill-soldier-in-papua-ng-s-2049629>

⁷ Anon., 'Court Rules the Internet Shutdowns in Papua and West Papua Were Illegal,' *AccessNow*, June 3, 2020, <https://www.accessnow.org/court-rules-the-internet-shutdowns-in-papua-and-west-papua-are-illegal/>

⁸ Anon., 'West Papuan Liberation Movement Condemns Racist Slur,' *RNZ*, January 29, 2021, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/435386/west-papua-liberation-movement-condemns-racist-slurs>

⁹ Leon Langdon, 'In Exile, an Icon of the West Papuan Independence Struggle Fades,' *The Diplomat*, January 29, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/01/in-exile-an-icon-of-the-west-papuan-independence-struggle-fades/>