

Papuans call for safety of civilians

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As authorities continue to hunt down armed rebels linked to the Free Papua Movement (OPM) who recently killed civilians in Nduga Regency, Papua, local figures have voiced concerns over the security of residents fleeing their villages amid a security crackdown.

Following the armed group's attacks on civilians and an Indonesian Military (TNI) post in Mbua, which killed dozens of construction workers and one TNI soldier, hundreds of villagers across Nduga have escaped to the forests, said Rev. Benny Giay, chairman of the Kemah Injili Church Sinode of Papua.

While admitting that it was difficult to stay updated on the situation in Mbua, Yigi, Yal and other villages in the regency, Benny said the military crackdown had frightened the civilians.

"There are at least six presbyteries in the area that oversee at least six congregations. Each congregation has about 30 people and all of them have fled their homes due to the trauma of past violence," Benny said.

Samuel Tabuni, director of the Papua Language Institute, shared Benny's sentiment, saying that villagers had taken shelter deep in the forests and might struggle due to a lack of supplies.

The residents of Alguru in Kenyam, Nduga, were able to escape to Timika or Wamena.

Those from Yal and Mbua, among other villagers, would not be able to escape the security crackdown in their areas unless they went deep into the forest and tried to survive in the jungle, Samuel said.

"We are concerned that their lives might be in jeopardy," he said. "If they don't eat for more than three days and stay in the forests, their lives would be at stake and more people might die."

Both local figures were told that four civilians—two in Mbua and two in Yigi—had been shot dead when security personnel tried to retrieve the bodies of construction workers of state-owned company PT Istaka Karya.

The workers had been shot by a National Liberation Army

Villagers in Nduga flee homes amid security crackdown, stay in forests without sufficient supplies

Joint security task force continues to hunt down rebels, Wiranto says

of West Papua (TPNPB) faction led by Egianus Kogoya, who had claimed responsibility for the massacre on Dec. 1.

"The civilians are not part of [the OPM]," Samuel said, adding that the operation must be stopped and security forces must seek other measures that would not endanger the lives of civilians.

Papua has been a hotbed of pro-independence movements since its integration into Indonesia in 1962.

Critics have said a militaristic approach would not end the circle of violence in the region, putting civilians in danger both at the hands of security forces and armed groups.

Cendrawasih military command spokesman Col. Muhammad Aidi said the TNI could not verify reports of the four civilians who were said to have been killed during a security operation, as there had been no mention of where their bodies were located.

Aidi acknowledged that many villagers fled to the forests after the killings, but some have gradually been returning to their homes in the past few days.

"We call on the rest to immediately return home and we could guarantee their safety."

Coordinating Political, Legal and Security Affairs Minister Wiranto said security personnel were still searching for four construction workers who remained missing.

Authorities have so far recovered 17 bodies and rescued four survivors.

"We hope that we will be able to find [the other four] alive," Wiranto said on Tuesday.

The joint security task force would continue to hunt down the TPNPB rebels, who escaped after attempting to retaliate, Wiranto said.

"They have spread propaganda to frighten people [...] They have committed inhumane crimes and we must fight against them."