Dear __________ MP,

I am writing to ask for your support regarding the atrocious human rights and environmental abuses that are currently taking place in West Papua - the Indonesian half of the Island of New Guinea, which has been occupied by the Republic of Indonesia against the will of Indigenous Papuans since the 1960s.

You may not be aware, but in a recent UN Access Dabte in the House of Lords [Monday 17th April], various members expressed their concerns about the long-standing and little-known conflict in West Papua, and highlighted the need for the UK Government to intervene. They specifically emphasised the need to pursue a visit from the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to the region at the earliest possible opportunity - something the Indonesian Government agreed to do in 2018 - and to emphasise the importance of using the UK’s increasingly strong bilateral partnership with Indonesia to influence their horrendous human rights agenda. Unfortunately, the response from the Minister responding to the debate was far from reassuring.

The UK Government’s response needs to meet the scale of the conflict

The long-standing and little-known conflict in West Papua has escalated significantly in recent months, and without a high-level intervention, I am concerned that Indigenous Papuans will continue to be subjected to what many consider to be a state-led genocide against them.

Over 2,000 additional military personnel were deployed to West Papua in March, as part of a new military operation that is currently taking place there, ostensibly to recover New Zealand Pilot Philip Mehrtens - who was kidnapped by the West Papua National Liberation Army [TPN-PB] earlier this year. Every day there are reports of the torture, intimidation, and slaughter of innocent civilians that is occurring as a result, and I have learned of women, children and high school students being arrested and tortured by the Indonesian military, and of multiple innocent civilians being executed without trial. Please note that many of these atrocities are taking place outside of the Nduga regency where the pilot is reportedly based. Clearly, the Government is using this kidnapping as an excuse to move indiscriminately to displace Indigenous Papuans from their lands, and free up access to the precious natural resources that lie beneath them.

Over 60,000 indigenous Papuans been displaced by military operations in West Papua since 2019 – and these numbers will have risen considerably over recent months, with many being forced to live in squalid conditions in camps for Internally Displaced Peoples (IDPs).
Indeed, the displacement of indigenous Melanesian Papuans and the ongoing efforts to sideline them from economic activities has become so bad that many believe a route to peace will not be established without a significant intervention from ‘The West’. It is worth reiterating that many of these human rights abuses – which are also having devastating environmental consequences - are intrinsically linked with the Indonesian Government’s pro-development agenda that the UK Government has expressed support for. Many projects such as the trans-papua highway and the mega food estate are cutting directly through indigenous ancestral lands, without securing the ‘free, prior and informed consent’ that International human rights law, the Indonesian Constitution, and the country’s national legislation requires.

No matter what way we look at it, the UK has a responsibility to continue to use its considerable leverage to address this situation. British citizens consume the products that emerge from environmental destruction in the region, and our financiers have stakes in the businesses which are facilitating it - including the controversial BP gas project in Bintuni bay which is causing stunting and health issues for those living around it.

The UK Government has emphasised their commitment towards supporting equitable and fair development within Papua and West Papua - neither of which are adjectives that can be used to describe the current situation. Furthermore, the FCDO has also stated their intent to conduct joint training exercises and exchanges with the Indonesian military who are committing these human rights abuses – including in ‘Jungle warfare’ - and to renew the Memorandum of Understanding between Indonesia’s Ministry of Defence and the UK, which expired in October 2022. Building and celebrating a strategic partnership with Indonesia and training their military whilst these issues are ongoing is akin to enabling them.

As such, I am calling on your support to urge the UK Government to do the following:

- Ask the Indonesian Government to immediately, and without delay, issue the long-awaited invitation to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to visit West Papua and assess the ongoing conflict in the region.
- Call for an immediate independent investigation into human rights violations in West Papua.
- Call for the implementation of a humanitarian ceasefire to enable aid organisations to reach displaced peoples living in and around conflict zones.
- Put an immediate halt to the planning and implementation of all proposed joint training exercises with the Indonesian military – as proposed in the UK-Indonesia Partnership Roadmap 2022 to 2023 - until these investigations have concluded.
- Use the opportunity of renewing the expired Memorandum of Understanding between the UK and the Indonesian Ministry of Defence [expired October 2022] to explicitly emphasise that the UK will not tolerate any human rights of environmental abuses at the hands of the Indonesian military.

As it stands, the current situation in West Papua directly violates at least five of the UK’s objectives in supporting human rights that are outlined in the FCDO’s latest Human Rights Programme Summary. I am sure you will agree that this cannot continue.
I look forward to hearing back from you, and thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

Your name and signature