



Creative resistance to the Indonesian occupation of West Papua

The Freedom Flotilla, initiated by Indigenous Elders of Australia and West Papua, aims to build global solidarity and highlight the abuses of human rights and land rights carried out under the occupations of their lands.

Having begun as a 5000km land convoy from Lake Eyre in Central Australia to Cairns in Far North Queensland, the Flotilla is now sailing up the coast and across the Torres Strait to Merauke in West Papua. On board is an interchanging crew that includes Aboriginal elders, West Papuan leaders and refugees, a former Australian soldier, a grandmother, musicians, an engineer, a photographer, and a film crew.

The group is traveling with Australian Original Nations Passports and West Papuan visa stamps. This documentation was issued by Indigenous elders, who assert their sovereign authority to grant travel between their lands.

The Freedom Flotilla is facing coral reefs, crocodiles and high winds to bring attention to the under-reported injustices and atrocities currently occurring in West Papua, and to create avenues for dialogue between the West Papuan independence movement and the Indonesian government.



The boats: *Wiotira Liberty* (above);
Pog Mahone (below right) and
Trudy (below left)



They are not only navigating treacherous waters, but may be sailing into the midst of an international incident – the Indonesian navy and air-force are preparing to intercept the boats, and the incumbent Foreign Minister of Australia is attempting damage control by threatening to deny consular assistance to the participants. Meanwhile a broad coalition of politicians, churches, human rights groups and union leaders has joined the call for the Freedom Flotilla's safe passage.

Protests have been held Melbourne, Brisbane, the Netherlands and West Papua itself, where over 5000 people have marched in support of the Freedom Flotilla, and four people were arrested. They are currently facing charges of treason, which carries a maximum term of life imprisonment.

The Freedom Flotilla anticipates landing on West Papuan soil in September, to conduct a ceremony re-establishing the ancient thread that once linked the indigenous peoples of West Papua and Australia.

Social Media

[Real-time geotracker](#)

[Daily "Pogcasts"](#)

Facebook: [Freedom Flotilla to West Papua](#)

Twitter: [@Flotilla2WP](#)

Contact Details

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The boats are contactable via satellite phone; see below for profiles of those available for interview.

Timeline

January 2000

Jacob Rumbiak makes a delegation from West Papua to the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra, meeting Arabunna elder Uncle Kevin Buzzacott for the first time

January 2006

43 West Papuan asylum seekers arrived in Cape York by canoe, sparking a diplomatic row between Australia and Indonesia when all of the group were recognised as genuine refugees fleeing from persecution

June 2013

1st – **Melbourne**, Trades Hall: Freedom Flotilla passport ceremony

– Peaceful support rally in Manokwari, Papua

July

20th to 24th – The group meet at **Lake Eyre** and conduct a ceremony, collecting water to be carried throughout the journey and presented to west Papuan Elders

25th to 31st – Convoy travels through NSW to Queensland, conducting ceremonies with Bundjalung and Jagera Elders

August

2nd to 16th – The convoy meets local communities along the **Capricorn coast**, holding information nights and performances of West Papuan music

17th – The boats set off from **Cairns** - a fleet of 5 yachts, 9 kayaks, 3 sailing dingies and a catamaran

21st – The Aboriginal Tent Embassy in **Canberra** holds a press conference outside the Indonesian embassy to ask for safe passage for the flotilla and to call for UN action in West Papua

24th – Flotilla arrives in **Cooktown**

27th – Demonstration outside the Indonesian embassy in **Melbourne**

– Peaceful actions and prayers held in Fak-Fak and Manokwari where 2500 people marched carrying banners welcoming the Freedom Flotilla

28th – West Papuan protests in Marauke and Sorong, where 2000 people gathered at a church hall, praying for the safe passage of the Freedom Flotilla to West Papua. Four customary leaders were arrested for treason.

29th – Protest at **the Hague** in the Netherlands

September

2nd – Protest at the **Brisbane** office of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

3rd – Amnesty International demands Indonesian authorities drop charges against Sorong Freedom Flotilla supporters

Mid September – expected arrival in West Papua



Quotes

Uncle Kevin Buzzacott, Arabunna Aboriginal Elder: *"We have a responsibility to care for our brothers and sisters from across the water. We must bring the water and the fire, the love and the music to heal the country and move in solidarity"*

Jacob Rumbiak, exiled West Papuan Elder: *"This mission will reunite our Indigenous family link, which was broken by geological evolution and colonial boundaries."*

Senator Bob Carr, incumbent Foreign Minister of Australia : *"We've given them this warning. Therefore, should they end up in prison ... we've got no obligation to give them consular support."* AAP (Aug 20th)

The Australian (Aug 16): *"Maritime law and security experts have added to safety concerns about the "freedom flotilla", warning the Aboriginal, Papuan and other activists involved could end up serving time in Indonesian jails."*

Indonesia's deputy co-ordinating political, legal and security affairs minister, Agus Barnas: *"We're paying special attention, and intensifying [our patrols]. If they enter Indonesian water, the armed forces will take measures"* (The Guardian, Aug 20th)

Warren Entsch, Liberal Party MP: *"I think that [West Papuans] have been oppressed for far too long and I think It's more about resources than ... anything else"*. (Freedom Flotilla media release, Aug 17 2013)

Quick Facts: Indonesian Occupation of West Papua

- Indonesia acquired West Papua in 1969, after a sham ballot on independence in which only 1026 people were hand picked to vote for a population of 800,000.¹
- Home to immense gold, copper, natural gas and timber resources, over 1/6th of the total tax revenue of Indonesia comes from West Papua. The world's biggest gold deposit is at Freeport's Grasberg mine. BP has a multi-billion dollar natural gas operation in the region. However, the poverty rate in Papua is the highest in the country.²
- Thousands of Papuans have been displaced, kidnapped, tortured and killed to protect these projects; entire villages have been bombed and destroyed.³
- Over the past five decades thousands of West Papuans have been arbitrarily detained for political activity. Many have been convicted of treason for raising the morning star flag and are serving long prison sentences.⁴
- Restricted access for journalists and NGOs – the International Committee of the Red Cross was ordered to close their office in West Papua – prevents widespread reporting of abuses.⁵

¹ *An Act of Free Choice: Decolonisation and the Right to Self-Determination in West Papua*, Pieter Droogleever 2005. Pieter

² Papua province has a poverty rate (rural and urban) of 30.66% in 2012, the highest in Indonesia and far above the national average of 11.66%. Indonesian Bureau of Statistics. 2012

³ *Genocide in West Papua?*, John Wing with Peter King. Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Sydney. 2005

⁴ *No Political Prisoners? The suppression of political protest in West Papua*, TAPOL. 2013

⁵ <http://www.etan.org/issues/wpapua/2012/1203wpap.htm>

Images and video

A bank of images is available for download from the Freedom Flotilla website. A photographer is on board one of the boats with additional images. A 4-minute video reel including footage of the boats and the protests is also available on request for use in news stories.



The Crew



Uncle Kevin Buzzacott is an Aboriginal elder from the Arabunna nation in South Australia. He has campaigned widely for cultural recognition, justice and land rights for Aboriginal people. Uncle Kev is the honorary president of the [Australian Nuclear Free Alliance](#) and recipient of the [Nuclear Free Future Award](#).



Jacob Rumbiak is the foreign affairs minister of the [Federated Republic of West Papua](#). His close relationship with Kevin began in 2000 when they met at the [Aboriginal Tent Embassy](#), after escaping from 10 years imprisonment to political exile in Australia. During his exile he has worked to build a [grassroots campaign in Melbourne](#) and acted as a diplomatic envoy to political leaders from around the world. Jacob's journey to freedom was portrayed in the short animation [Interview #16](#) by Charlie Hill-Smith.



Isabella Brown is a key organiser of the flotilla and founder of the [United Struggle Project](#), rapper in Melbourne hip-hop band [Combat Wombat](#) and co founder of the Lab Rats Solar Sound System. A lyricist, performer and filmmaker, her latest film [Ghettomoto](#) premiered at the London International Documentary Film Festival. Izzy's main motivation is a love for music and belief in social and environmental justice.



Amos Wainggai, originally from Yapen Island West Papua, came to Australia by canoe with [42 other asylum seekers in 2006](#). He is one of the presenters of the West Papuan community show '[Voice of West Papua](#)' on Radio 3cr. Making the return journey via sea, to the land where he fled from persecution, he hopes support his people who still live under repression.



Ronny Kareni is an Independence advocate with [Rize of the Morning Star](#), a campaign that uses music to shed light on the struggle of the West Papuan People. Ronny is a bass player in [Tabura](#) and [Sing-Sing](#) and tours around Australia and the Pacific sharing the music and culture of Oceania. Ronny Kareni grew up as a refugee from West Papua in Wewak, PNG.



Lexie: "The Freedom Flotilla West Papua combines my passion for music, sailing and social justice into an adventure led by inspirational elders and freedom fighters. I am truly humbled to be involved."